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THE HUGUENOT.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
New-Street-Square,

THE
HUGUENOT:
A TALE
OF
THE FRENCH PROTESTANTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“THE GIPSY,” “THE ROBBER,”
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

LONDON:
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1839.

THE HUGUENOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLANATIONS.

SILENT and lonely thought is a sad dispeller of enchantments. Under its power, the visions, and hopes, and indistinct dreams, which had fluttered before the eyes of the Count de Morseiul during the magic moments he had passed with Clémence de Marly, fled like fairies at the approach of the sun, within a very short period after he had retired to his chamber; and all that remained was a sort of reproachful mournfulness, when he thought over his own conduct and the indulgence of those feelings which he feared he had displayed but too plainly. With such thoughts he lay down to rest; but they were not soothing companions of the pillow, and it

was long ere he slept. From time to time he heard the sound of music from the halls below; and in the intervals, when some open door gave a freer passage to the sound, gay laughing voices came merry on the ear, speaking cheerfulness, and happiness, and contentment, and ignorance, of the cares and sorrows and anxieties of life.

“Alas!” thought the Count, as he lay and listened, “alas! that such bright illusions should ever pass away, and that those should ever learn the touch of grief and anguish and despair, who are now laughing in the heedless merriment of youth, unconscious of danger or of sorrow. And yet, perhaps,” he continued, “could we lay bare the hearts of those now seemingly so gay—could we examine what is their ordinary state, and what their feelings were, even a few short moments before they entered those saloons—we might find there also as much care and pain as in any other scene of life, and bless the glad merriment that lulls human pangs and anxieties for a time, though it cannot quench them altogether.”

Though he went to sleep late, he rose early on the following morning, not forgetful of his appointment with Clémence de Marly. Fearful, however, that she might be in the gardens

before him, he dressed himself and hastened out without the loss of a single minute, not a little anxious to know what was the nature of the communication which she had to make to him, and with which the Duc de Rouvré was evidently acquainted. He was in truth, anxious in regard to every part of their conversation, he was anxious in regard to its result; but still he did not lay out at all the conduct he was to pursue towards her, feeling that he had wakened from the dream of the evening before, and was not likely to indulge in such visions again. There was nobody in the part of the garden near the house; and he walked on in the direction which she had pointed out to him, till he had nearly reached the rampart, and thus satisfied himself that she had not yet arrived. He then turned back by the same path, and before he had gone half way down, he beheld Clémence coming towards him, but at some distance.

She was certainly looking more lovely than ever; and he could not but feel that, even in her very gayest and most sparkling moods, there was a charm wanting in comparison with her more serious and thoughtful aspect. Clémence was now evidently a good deal agitated. It

often happens, when we have an act of importance to perform, especially when that act is unusual to us, that even in revolving it in our own minds, and preparing for the moment, we overpower ourselves, as it were, by the force of our own thoughts, and, by guarding against agitation, give agitation the better opportunity to assail us.

Albert of Morseiul saw that Clémence was much moved, and he prepared to soothe her by every means in his power. The only efficacious means being to draw her attention to ordinary things. “Let me offer you my arm,” he said in a kindly tone ; and leading her on, he spoke of the beauty of the morning, and then of Anette de Marville, and then of other indifferent things. Clémence seemed to understand his object; and though she at first smiled, as if to intimate that she did so, she gave her mind up to his guidance, and for five or ten minutes touched upon no subject but the most ordinary topics of conversation. As they approached the rampart, however, and she had an opportunity of looking along it, and ascertaining that there was no one there, she said,—

“Now I am better, now I can speak of other things.—Monsieur de Morseiul,” she con-

tinued, “although I am accustomed to do extraordinary things, and to behave, in many respects, unlike other people, I dare say you do not suppose that I would have taken the very bold step of asking any gentleman to meet me here, as I have done you this day, without a motive sufficient to justify me, even in your sight.”

“I am quite sure of it,” replied the Count; “and though you may think me, perhaps, a harsh censor, I am not at all inclined to be so in your case.”

“Indeed?” she said, with a somewhat mournful shake of the head; “Indeed?—But, however, Monsieur de Morseul, what I have to tell you is substantial, real, and more important than any feelings or inclinations. I shall have to pain you—to grieve you—to call up apprehensions—to prepare you, perhaps, for suffering! Oh God!” she cried, bursting suddenly into tears, “that I should have to do this!”

The Count took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and besought her to be calm and soothed. “Do not be apprehensive, do not be grieved,” he said: “calm yourself, dear lady, calm yourself, Clémence! I am prepared for much sorrow; I am prepared for danger and

anxiety. I have for some time seen nothing but clouds and storms in the future!"

"But not such as these," replied Clémence, "not such as these. But I will not keep you in suspense, for that is worse than all now. The task, though a painful one, has been of my own seeking. First, Monsieur de Morseiul, to speak of that which I know is dearest to your heart — your religious liberty is in danger — it is more than in danger — it is at an end. The whole resolutions of the court are now made known — at least, amongst the principal Catholics of France. The reformed church is to be swept away — there is no longer to be any but one religion tolerated throughout the kingdom — your temples are to be overthrown — your ministers to be forbidden, on pain of death, to worship God as their forefathers have done — the edict of Nantes is to be revoked entirely ;" and, clasping her hands together, she gazed in his face, while she added, in a low, tremulous, but distinct, voice, "you are to be driven to the mass at the point of the pike — your children are to be taken from you to be educated in another faith!"

Till she uttered the last words Albert de Morseiul had remained with his eyes bent upon

the ground, though deep feelings of agitation were evident in every line of his fine countenance. But when she spoke of the Protestants being driven to mass at the point of the pike, and their children being taken from them to be educated in the Catholic religion, he threw back his head, gazing up to heaven with a look of firm determination, while his left hand, by a natural movement, fell upon the hilt of his sword.

Clémence de Marly, as he did so, gazed upon him earnestly through the tears that were still in her eyes, and then exclaimed, as she saw how terribly moved he was, “These are dreadful tidings for me to tell Monsieur de Morseul : you must hate me, I am sure you must hate me !”

“Hate you ?” exclaimed the Count, clasping both her hands in his, while in that agitating moment — carried away by the strength of his own feelings, and by the tokens she displayed of deep interest in him and his — every barrier gave way before the passion of his heart. “Hate you ? oh God ! I love you but too well, too deeply — better, more deeply, than you can ever know, or divine, or dream of !”

Clémence turned away her head, with a face

glowing like the rose ; but she left her hands in his, without an effort to withdraw them, though she exclaimed, “ Say not so ! say not so ! — Or at least,” she added, turning round once more towards him — “ say not so till you have heard all ; for I have much, much more to tell, more painful, more terrible still. Let me have one moment to recover,” and, withdrawing her hands, she placed them over her eyes for an instant. After a very brief pause she added, “ Now, Monsieur de Morseul, I can go on. You are here in great danger. You have been in great danger ever since you have been here ; and it has only been the power and authority of the Duke that has protected you. After your first intercourse with the governor, the bishop and the two ecclesiastics, a party has been made in the town, in the states, and in the province, against you, and, alas ! against the good Duc de Rouvré too. Finding that they were likely to incur the anger of the King for something that had happened, if they did not make good their own case against you, they have laboured, I may say, night and day, to counteract the measures of the Duke with the states, so as to make him obnoxious to the King. They have pretended that you, — while you were here before — held ille-

gal meetings with Huguenots in the neighbourhood, in order to oppose and frustrate the measures of the King. They have got the intendant of the province upon their side, and they insisted, to Monsieur de Rouvré, on your being instantly arrested, they having proffered distinct information of your having held a meeting with other Protestant noblemen, about three miles from this place, on the day of the hunting. Do you remember that day?"

"I shall never forget it!" replied the Count, gazing upon her with a look that made her eyes sink again.

"Well," she continued, "Monsieur de Rouvré would not consent; and when the intendant threatened to arrest you on his own responsibility, the governor was obliged to say that he would defend you, and protect you, if necessary, by the interposition of the military force at his command. This created a complete breach, which is now only apparently healed. Both parties have applied to the King, and Monsieur de Rouvré entertained the strongest hopes till yesterday that the decision would have been in his favour, both inasmuch as justice was on his side, and as he had obtained from the states a large supply, which he knew would be most gra-

tifying and acceptable to the court ; but suddenly, yesterday morning, news arrived of the general measures which the council intended to pursue. These I have already told you, and they showed the Duke that every thing would give way to bigotry and superstition. Various letters communicated the same intelligence to others as well as to the Duke, but I having——”

She paused and hesitated, while the colour came and went rapidly in her cheek. “ Speak, dear lady, speak,” said the Count eagerly.

“ I believe I may speak,” she said, “ after something that you said but now. I was going to say that, I having before taken upon me, perhaps sillily, when first these men brought their false charge against you, to meddle with this business, from feelings that I must not and cannot explain, and having then made the Duke tell me the whole business, by earnest prayers and entreaties—that he seeing that I was—that I was interested in the matter, told me all the rest, and gave me permission to tell you the whole this morning, in order that you may guard against the measures that he fears are coming; ‘ I must n’t tell him myself,’ he said, ‘ and, as the business has been communicated alone to Catholics, he is not likely to hear it, till too late.

Nevertheless, it is no secret, the matter having been told openly to at least twenty people in this town. You can therefore do it yourself, Clémence, that he may not say I have lured him back here into the jaws of his enemies.' Thus then Monsieur de Morseiul," she continued more collectedly, "thus it is that I have acted as I have acted; and oh, if you would take my advice, painful as I acknowledge it is to give it, you would proceed instantly to Morseiul, and then either fly to England, or to some other country where you will be in safety."

"How shall I thank you!" replied Albert of Morseiul, taking her hand, and casting behind him all consideration of his own fate and that of his fellow Protestants, to be thought of at an after moment, while, for the time, he gave his whole attention to the words which he had himself just spoken with regard to his love for Clémence de Marly "How shall I ever thank you for the interes. you have taken in me, for your kindness, for your generous kindness, and for all the pain that this I see has caused you! Pray, Clémence, pray add one more boon to those you have conferred, forgive the rash and presumptuous words I spoke just now—and forget them also."

“Forget them !” exclaimed Clémence, clasping her hands and raising her bright eyes to his. “Forget them ! Never, as long as I have being ! Forgive them, Monsieur de Morseiul ; that were easily done if I could believe them true.”

“They are as true as Heaven !” replied the Count ; “But oh, Clémence, Clémence, lead me not away into false dreams ! lead me not away to think that possible which is impossible.—Can it, ought it to be ?”

“I know not what you mean,” replied Clémence, with a look somewhat bewildered, somewhat hurt. “All I know is, Monsieur de Morseiul, that you have spoken words which justify me to myself for feelings—ay, and perhaps for actions,—in regard to which I was doubtful — fearful — which sometimes made me blush when I thought of them. The words that you have spoken take away that blush. I feel that I had not mistaken you ; but yet,” she added, “tell me before you go, for I feel that it must be soon. What is it that you mean ? What is the import of your question ?”

“Oh, it means much and many things, Clémence,” replied the Count : “it takes in a wide range of painful feelings ; and when I acknowledge, and again and again say, that the

words I have spoken are true as Heaven ; when, again and again, I say that I love you deeply, devotedly, entirely, better than aught else on earth, I grieve that I have said them, I feel that I have done wrong."

Clémence de Marly withdrew her hand, not sharply, not coldly, but mournfully, and she raised her fair countenance towards the sky as if asking, with apprehension at her heart, "What is thy will, oh Heaven?" — "Albert of Morseiul," she said, "if you have any cause to regret that those words have been spoken, let them be for ever between us as if unspoken. They shall never by me be repeated to any one. You may perhaps one day, years hence," and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears, — "you may perhaps regret what you are now doing; but it will be a consolation to you then to know, that even though you spoke words of love and then recalled them, they were ever, as they ever shall be, a consolation and a comfort to me. The only thing on earth that I could fear was the blame of my own heart for having thought you loved me, — and perhaps loved," she added, while a deep blush again spread over all her countenance, "and perhaps loved, when you did not. You have shielded me

from that blame: you have taken away all self-reproach; and now God speed you, Albert! Choose your own path, follow the dictates of your own heart, and your own conscience, and farewell!"

"Stay, stay, Clémence," said the Count de Morseul, detaining her by the hand. "Yet listen to me; yet hear me a few words farther!"

She turned round upon him with one of her former smiles. "You know how easily such requests are granted," she said; "you know how willingly I would fain believe you all that is noble, and just, and honourable, and perfectly incapable of trifling with a woman's heart."

"First, then," said the Count, "let me assure you that the words I have spoken were not, as you seemed to have imagined, for your ear alone, to be disavowed before the world. Ever shall I be ready, willing, eager to avow those words, and the love I feel, and have spoken of, will never, can never die away in my heart. But oh, Clémence, do you remember the words that passed between us in this very garden, as to whether a woman could love twice? Do you remember what you acknowledged yourself on that occasion?"

"And do you believe, then," said Clémence,

“ after all that you have seen, that I have ever loved? Do you believe,” she said, with the bright but scornful smile that sometimes crossed her lip, “ that because Clémence de Marly has suffered herself to be surrounded by fools and coxcombs, the one to neutralise and oppose the other—whereas if she had not done so, she must have chosen one from the herd to be her lord and master, and have become his slave—do you imagine, I say, that she has fallen in love with pretty Monsieur de Hericourt, with his hair frizzled like a piece of pastry, his wit as keen as a baby’s wooden sword, and his courage of that high discriminating quality which might be well led on by a child’s trumpet? Or with the German prince, who, though a brave man and not without sense, is as courteous as an Italian mountebank’s dancing bear, who thinks himself the pink of politeness when he hands round a hat to gather the sous, growling between his teeth all the time that he does so? Or with the Duc de Melcourt, who though polished and keen, and brave as his sword, is as cold-hearted as the iron that lies within that scabbard, and in seeking Clémence de Marly seeks three requisite things to accomplish a French nobleman’s household, a large fortune which may

pay cooks and serving men, and give at least two gilded coaches more; a handsome wife that cares nothing for her husband, and is not likely to disturb him by her love; and some influence at court which may obtain for him the next blue riband vacant?—Out upon them all!” she added vehemently; “and fie, fie, fie, upon you, Albert of Morseiul! If I thought that you could love a person of whom you judged so meanly, I should believe you unworthy of another thought from me.”

It is useless to deny, that every word she spoke was pleasant to the ear of the Count de Morseiul; but yet she had not exactly touched the point towards which his own apprehensions regarding her had turned, and though he did not choose to name the Chevalier, he still went on.

“I have thought nothing of the kind you speak of Clémence,” he replied, “but I may have thought it possible for you to have met with another more worthy of your thoughts and of your affection than any of these; that you may have loved him; and that on some quarrel, either temporary or permanent, your indignation towards him, and your determination not to let him see the pain he has occasioned, may have made you fancy yourself in love with another.

May not this be the case? But still, even were it not so, there is much—But I ask,” he added, seeing the colour of Clémence fluttering like the changing colours on the plumage of a bird, “but I ask again, may it not have been so?”

Clémence gazed at him intently and steadfastly for a moment, and there was evidently a struggle going on in her breast of some kind. Perhaps Albert of Morseil might misunderstand the nature of that struggle; indeed, it is clear he did so in some degree, for it certainly confirmed him in the apprehensions which he had entertained. The air and the expression of Clémence varied considerably while she gazed upon him. For a moment there was the air of proud beauty and careless caprice with which she treated the lovers of whom she had just spoken so lightly; and the next, as some memory seemed to cross her mind, the haughty look died away into one of subdued tenderness and affection. An instant after, sadness and sorrow came over her face like a cloud, and her eyes appeared to be filling with irrepressible tears. She conquered that, too; and when she replied, it was with a smile so strangely mingled with various expressions, that it was difficult to discern which predominated. There was a certain degree of

pride in her tone; there was sorrow upon her brow; and yet there was a playfulness round her eyes and lips, as if something made her happy amidst it all.

“Such might be the case,” she replied, “such is very likely to be the case with all women. But pray, Sir — having settled it all so well and so wisely — who was the favoured person who had thus won Clémence de Marly’s love, while some few others were seeking for it in vain? Your falcon, Fancy, was certainly not without a lure. I see it clearly, Monsieur de Morseiul.”

“It might be one,” replied the Count, “whose rival I would never become, even were other things done away; it might be one long and deeply regarded by myself.”

“The Chevalier, the Chevalier!” exclaimed Clémence, with her whole face brightening into a merry smile. “No, no, no! You have been deceiving yourself. No, no, Count; the Chevalier d’Evran never has been, never will be, any thing to me but that which he is now; we have had no quarrel, we have had no coldness. It is quite possible, Monsieur de Morseiul, believe me, even for a weak woman like myself to feel friendship and place confidence without love.”

She strove in some degree to withdraw the

hand that the Count had taken, as if she were about to leave him ; but the Count detained it, gently saying, “ Stay yet one moment, Clémence ; let us yet have but one word more of explanation before we part.”

“ No,” she replied, disengaging her hand, “ no ; we have had explanations enough. Never wed a woman of whom you have a single doubt, Sir. No, no,” she added, with a look slightly triumphant perhaps, somewhat sorrowful, but somewhat playful withal ; “ no, no ! Clémence de Marly has already, perhaps, said somewhat too much already ! But one thing I will tell you, Albert of Morseiul — you love her ! She sees it, she knows it, and from henceforth she will not doubt it — for a woman does not trust by halves like a man. You love her ! You will love her ! and, though you have perhaps somewhat humiliated her ; though you have made the proud humble and the gay melancholy, it is perhaps no bad lesson for her, and she will now make you sue, before you gain as a previous lover that which you now seem to require some pressing to accept. Adieu, Monsieur de Morseiul ; there is, I see, somebody coming ; adieu.”

“ Stay yet a moment, Clémence ; hear me yet urge something in my defence,” exclaimed her

lover. But Clémence proceeded down the steps from the rampart, only pausing and turning to say in a tone of greater tenderness and interest,—

“ Farewell, Albert, farewell; and for God’s sake forget not the warning that I gave you this morning, nor any of the matters so much more worthy of attention than the worthless love of a gay capricious girl.”

Thus saying, she hastened on, and passing by the person who was coming forward from the house — and who was merely a servant attached to the Count de Morseuil, as usual hunting out his master to interrupt him at the most inappropriate time — she hurried to a small door to the left of the building, entered, and mounting a back staircase which led towards her own apartments, she sought shelter therein from all the many eyes that were at that time beginning to move about the place; for her face was a tablet on which strong and recent emotion was deeply and legibly written.

Nor had that emotion passed, indeed; but, on the contrary, new and agitating thoughts had been swelling upon her all the way through the gardens, as she returned alone—the memories of one of those short but important lapses of time which change with the power of an en-

chanter the whole course of our being, which alter feeling and thoughts and hope and expectation, give a different direction to aspiration and effort and ambition, which add wings and a fiery sword to enthusiasm, and, in fact, turn the thread of destiny upon a new track through the labyrinth of life.

There was in the midst of those memories one bright and beautiful spot ; but it was mingled with so many contending feelings—there was so much alloy to that pure gold — that, when at length she reached her dressing-room and cast herself into a chair, she became completely overpowered, and, bursting into tears, wept bitterly and long.

The old and faithful attendant whom Albert of Morsieul had seen with her in the forest, and who was indeed far superior to the station which she filled, both by talents, education, and heart, now witnessing the emotion of her young mistress, glided up and took her hand in hers, trying by every quiet attention to tranquillise and soothe her. It was in vain, for a long time, however, that she did so ; and when at length Clémence had recovered in some degree her composure, and began to dry her eyes, the at-

tendant asked, eagerly, “ Dear, dear child, what is it has grieved you so ? ”

“ I will tell you, Maria ; I will tell you in a minute,” replied Clémence. “ You who have been a sharer of all my thoughts from my infancy—you who were given me as a friend by the dear mother I have lost—you who have preserved for me so much, and have preserved me myself so often—I will tell you all and every thing. I will have no concealment in this from you; for I feel, as if I were a prophet, that terrible and troublous times are coming; that it is my fate to take a deep and painful part therein; and that I shall need one like you to counsel, and advise, and assist, and support me in many a danger, and, for aught I know, in many a calamity.”

“ Dear Clémence, dear child,” said the attendant, “ I will ever do my best to soothe and comfort you; and what little assistance I can give shall be given; but I have trusted and I have hoped for many days—now both from what I have seen and what I have heard—that there was a stronger hand than that of a weak old woman soon about to be plighted to support and defend you for life.”

“Who do you mean?” exclaimed Clémence eagerly; “who are you speaking of, Maria?”

“Can you not divine?” demanded the old lady; “can you not divine that I mean him that we saw in the forest—him, who seemed to my old eyes to wed you then, with the ring that your mother gave you, when she told you never to part with it to any one but to the man who was to place it again on your finger as your husband.”

“Good heaven!” exclaimed Clemence, “I never thought of that! I am his wife then, Maria—at least I shall ever consider myself such.”

“But will he consider you so too?” demanded the attendant; “and do you love him enough to consider him so, dear child? I have never seen you love any one yet, and I only began to hope that you would love him when I saw your colour change as often as his name was mentioned.”

“I have said I would tell you all, Maria,” replied Clemence, “and I will tell you all. I never have loved any one before; and how could I, surrounded as I have been by the empty, and the vain, and the vicious,—by a crowd so full of

vices, and so barren of virtues, that a man thought himself superior to the whole world, if he had but one good quality to recommend him ; and what were the qualities on which they piqued themselves ? If a man had wit, he thought himself a match for an empress; if he had courage, though that, to say the truth, was the most general quality, he felt himself privileged to be a libertine, and a gamester, and an atheist ; and, instead of feeling shame, he gloried in his faults. How could I love any of such men ? How could I esteem them — the first step to love ? I have but heard one instance of true affection in the court of France — that of poor Conti to the King's daughter ; and I never fancied myself such a paragon as to be the second woman that could raise such attachment. Nothing less, however, would satisfy me, and therefore I determined to shape my course accordingly. I resolved to let the crowd that chose it follow, and flatter, and affect to worship, as much as ever they so pleased. It was their doing, not mine. I mean not to say that it did not please and amuse me : I mean not to say that I did not feel some sort of satisfaction — which I now see was wrong to feel — in using as slaves, in ordering here and there, in trampling upon

and mortifying a set of beings that I contemned and despised, and that valued me alone for gifts which I valued not myself. Had there been one man amongst them that at all deserved me—that gave one thought to my mind or to my heart, rather than to my beauty or my fortune—he would have hated me for the manner in which I treated him and others; and I might have learned to love him, even while he learned to condemn me. Such was not the case, however, for there was not one that did so. Had I declared my determination of never marrying, to be the slave of a being I despised, they would soon have put me in a convent, or at least have tried to do so; and I feared they might. Therefore it was I went on upon the same plan, sitting like a waxen virgin in a shrine, letting adorers come and worship as much as they pleased, and taking notice of none. There is not one of them that can say that I ever gave him aught but a cutting speech, or an expression of my contempt. It is now several years ago, but you must remember it well, when we were first with the Duke at Ruffigny."

"Oh, I remember it well," replied the attendant, "and the hunting, and your laying down the bridle like a wild careless girl, as you

then were, and the horse running away with you, and this very Count de Morseiul saving you by stopping it. Ay, I remember it all well, and you told me how gallant and handsome he looked, and all he had said; and I laughed, and told you you were in love with him."

"I was not in love," replied Clemence, with the colour slightly deepening in her cheek, "I was not in love; but I might soon have been so even then. I thought a great deal about him; I was very young, had mixed not at all with the world, and he was certainly at that time, in personal appearance, what might well realise the dream of a young and enthusiastic imagination.—He is older and graver now," she added, musing, "and time has made a change on him; but yet I scarcely think he is less handsome. However, I thought of him a good deal then, especially after I had met him the second time, and discovered who he was: and I thought of him often afterwards. Wherever there was any gallant action done, I was sure to listen eagerly, expecting to hear his name.—And how often did I hear it, Maria! Not a campaign passed but some new praises fell upon the Count de Morseiul. He had defended this post like some ancient hero, against whole legions of the

enemy. He had thrown himself into that small fort, which was considered untenable, and held an army at bay for weeks. He had been the first to plant his foot on the breach ; he had been the last in the rear upon a retreat. The peasant's cottage, the citizen's fire-side, owed their safety to him ; and the ministers of another religion than his own had found shelter and protection beneath his sword. I know not how it was, but when all these tales were told me, his image always rose up before me as I had seen him, and I pictured him in every action. I could see him leading the charging squadrons. I could see him standing in the deadly breach. I could see the women and the children, and the conquered and the wounded, clinging to his knees, and could see him saving them. I did not love him, Maria, but I thought of him a great deal more than of any one else in all the world. Well, then, after some years, came the last great service that he rendered us, not many weeks ago, and was not his demeanour then, Maria—was not his whole air and conduct in the midst of danger to himself and others—the peremptory demand of our liberation—the restoration of the ring I valued—the easy unshaken courtesy in a moment of

agitation and risk,—was it not all noble, all chivalrous, all such as a woman's imagination might well dwell upon?"

"It was, indeed," replied Maria, "and ever since then I have thought that you loved him."

"In the mean time," continued Clémence, "in the mean time I had also become sadly spoilt. I had grown capricious, and vain, and haughty, by indulging such feelings for several years, in pursuit of my own system; and when the Count appeared at Poitiers, I do not know that I was inclined to treat him well. Not that I would ever have behaved to him as I did to others; but I scarcely knew how to behave better. I believed myself privileged to say and do any thing I thought right, to exact any thing, nay, to command any thing. I was surprised when I found he took no notice of me; I was mortified perhaps; I determined, if ever I made him happy at last, to punish him for his first indifference,—to punish him, how think you? To make him love me, to make him doubtful of whether I loved him, and to make him figure in the train of those whom I myself despised. But, oh, Maria, I soon found that I could not accomplish what I sought. There

was a power, a command in his nature that overawed, that commanded me. Instead of teaching him to love me, and making him learn to doubt that I loved him, I soon found that it was I that loved, and learned to doubt that he loved me. Then came restlessness and quietude. From time to time I saw—I felt that he loved me, and then again I doubted, and strove to make him show it more clearly, by the very means best calculated to make him crush it altogether. I affected to listen to the frivolous and the vain, to smile upon the beings I despised, to assume indifference towards the only one I loved. Thus it went on till the last day of his stay, when he refused to accompany us on our hunting party, but left me with a promise to join us if he could. I was disappointed, mortified. I doubted if he would keep his promise. I doubted whether he had any inclination to do so, and I strove to forget, in the excitement of the chase, the bitterness of that which I suffered. Suddenly, however, I caught a glance of him riding down towards us. He came up to my side, he rode on by me, he attended to me, he spoke to me alone; there was a grace, and a dignity, and a glory about his person that was new and strange; he seemed as

if some new inspiration had come upon him. On every subject that we spoke of he poured forth his soul in words of fire. His eyes and his countenance beamed with living light, such as I had never before beheld; every thing vanished from my eyes and thoughts but him; every thing seemed small and insignificant and to bow before him; the very fiery charger that he rode seemed to obey, with scarcely a sign or indication of his will. The cavaliers around looked but like his attendants, and I — I Maria — proud, and haughty, and vain as I had encouraged myself to be — I felt that I was in the presence of my master, and that, there, beside me, was the only man on earth that I could willingly and implicitly obey — I felt subdued, but not depressed — I felt, perhaps, as a woman ought to feel towards a man she loves, that I was competent to be his companion and his friend, to share his thoughts, to respond to all his feelings, to enter into his views and opinions, to meet him, in short, with a mind yielding, but scarcely to be called inferior, different in quality, but harmonious in love and thought. I felt that he was one who would never wish me to be a slave; but one that I should be prompt and ready to bend to and obey. Can

I tell you, Maria, all the agony that took possession of my heart when I found that the whole bright scene was to pass away like a dream? Since then many a painful thing has happened. I have wrung my heart, I have embittered my repose by fancying that I have loved, where I was not loved in return, that I have been the person to seek, and he to despise me. But this day, this day, Maria, has come an explanation. He has told me that he loves me, he has told me that he has loved me long; he has taken away that shame, he has given me that comfort. We both foresee many difficulties, pangs, and anxieties; but, alas! Maria, I see plainly, not only that he discovers in the future far more difficulties, and dangers, and obstacles between us than I myself perceive, but also that he disapproves of much of my conduct — that doubts and apprehensions mingle with his love — that it is a thing which he has striven against, not from his apprehension of difficulties, but from his doubts of me and of my nature; that love has mastered him for a time; but still has not subdued him altogether. It is a bitter and a sad thing," she added, placing her hands over her eyes.

“ But, dear child,” said the attendant, “ it will be easy for you to remove all such doubts and apprehensions.”

“ Hush, hush,” replied Clemence, “ let me finish, Maria, and then say no more upon this score to-day. I will hear all you can say to-morrow. He is gone by this time; God knows whether we shall ever meet again. But, at all events, my conduct is determined; I will act in every respect, whether he be with me or whether he be absent from me, whether he misunderstands me or whether he conceives my motives exactly—I will act as I know he would approve if he could see every action and every movement of my heart. I will cast behind me all those things which I now feel were wrong; though, Heaven knows, I did not see that there was the slightest evil in any of them, till love for him has, with the quickness of a flash of lightning, opened my eyes in regard to my conduct towards others. I will do all, in short, that he ought to love me for; and, in doing that, I will in no degree seek him, but leave fate and God’s will to work out my destiny, trusting that with such purposes I shall be less miserable than I have been for the last week. And now, Maria,”

she added, “I have given you the picture of a woman’s heart. Let us dwell no more upon this theme, for I must wash away these tears, these new invaders of eyes that have seldom known them before, and go as soon as possible to Monsieur de Rouvré, to inform him of a part, at least, of my conversation with the Count.”

CHAPTER II.

THE RETURN.

SOMETIMES, amidst the storms and tempests of life, when the rain of sorrow has been pouring down amain, and the lightning of wrath been flashing on our path, the clouds overhead, heavy and loaded with mischief to come, and the thunder rolling round and round after the flash, there will come a brief calm moment of sweet tranquillity, as if wrath and enmity, and strife and care, and misfortune, had cast themselves down to rest, exhausted with their fury. Happy is the man who in such moments can throw from him remembrance of the past, and apprehension of the future, and taste the refreshing power without alloy. But seldom can we do so : the passed-by storm is fresh on memory, the threatening aspect of the sky is full before our eyes, and such was the case with Albert of Morseuil, as on the third day after leaving Poitiers he rode on towards his own abode.

The degree of impatient anxiety under which

he had laboured had caused him to make the two first days' journeys as long as possible, so that not above ten or twelve miles, or at most fifteen, lay between him and his own château, when he set out on that third morning from the inn.

Nothing occurred to disturb his journey ; every thing passed in peace and tranquillity ; known, loved, and respected in that part of the country, the people vied with each other as to which should show him the most affectionate civility, and no news either from the capital or Poitiers had reached him to dissipate the apparent calm around. Every thing wore the aspect of peace throughout the country. The peasant's wife sunned herself at the door of her cottage, with distaff and spindle in hand, plying lightly her daily toil, while her children ran or crawled about before her, full of enjoyment themselves, and giving enjoyment to her who beheld them. The peasant pursued his labour in the fields, and cheered it by a song ; and although the Count knew many of those whom he saw to be Protestants, there was no appearance of anxiety or apprehension amongst them. Every thing was cheerful, and contented, and tranquil, and the peace of the scene sank into his heart. Angels

may be supposed to look upon this earth's pleasures with a feeling of melancholy though not sadness, from a knowledge of their fragility; and so Albert of Morseiul, though he felt in some degree calmed and tranquillised by what he saw, yet could not prevent a sensation of deep melancholy from mingling with his other feelings, as he thought, “This can but last for a very, very little time.”

At length he turned into the very wood where he had encountered the robbers, which now bore, of course, a very different aspect in the full daylight from that which it had borne in the depth of the night. The summer sunshine was now streaming through the green leaves, and far away between the wide bolls of the trees, the mossy ground might be seen carpeted with velvet softness, and chequered with bright catches and streams of light. The road, too, though not in the full sunshine, was crossed here and there by long lines of radiance, and the sky over head was seen clear and blue, while every projecting branch of the tall trees above caught the light, and sparkled with a brighter green.

The aspect of this scene was more tranquillising still than the last; but it did not chase

the Count's deep melancholy ; and, finding that he was riding very slow, which only afforded time for thought when thought was useless, he turned round to see if his attendants were near, intending to ride on faster, if they were within sight. The road was very nearly straight ; and, at the distance of four or five hundred yards, passing one of the soft green refreshing shadows cast by the wood, he saw the body of servants riding gaily on after him, conversing together. Between him and them, however, just issuing from one of the green wood paths, which joined the high road, was another figure, which immediately called the Count's attention. It was that of an old man, plain and simple in his own appearance, but mounted on a mule, gaily tricked and caparisoned, as was the universal custom in those days, with fringes and knobs of red worsted, and bells of many a size and shape about its collar and head-stall. The rider was not one of those whom men forget easily ; and, though he was at a considerable distance as well as the attendants, the Count instantly recognised good Claude de l'Estang.

Seeing the Count pause, the old man put his mule into a quicker pace, and rode on towards him. When he came near he wished his young

friend joy of his return, but his own face was any thing but joyful.

“ We shall all be indeed glad to see you, my dear Albert,” he said, “ for we have very great need of your return on every account. Besides all these grievous and iniquitous proceedings against the Protestants, we have in our own bosom men who I hear had the impudence even to attack you; but who have since committed various other outrages of a marked and peculiar character. One man, I learn, has been shot dead upon the spot, another has been wounded severely, a third has been robbed and maltreated. But I cannot discover that any one has met with harshness, except such as are distinguished for a somewhat inordinate zeal in favour of the Catholic faith. Not a Protestant has been attacked, which marks the matter more particularly, and the peasantry themselves are beginning to notice the fact, so that it will not be long before their priests take notice of it, and the eyes of the state will be turned angrily upon us.”

“ I fear indeed that it will be so,” replied the Count; “ but whether the result will or will not be evil, God in his wisdom only knows.”

“ How is this, my dear Albert?” exclaimed

the clergyman. " You sent to me to ask that I should draw up a humble petition to the King, representing the Protestants as peaceful, humble, obedient subjects, and surely we must take every measure that we may not by our own actions give the lie to our own words."

" I will certainly, my dear friend," replied the Count, " take every measure that it is possible for man to take, to put down this evil system of plunder and violence, whether it be carried on by Protestants or Catholics. There is a notorious violation of the law, and I am determined to put it down if it be possible, without any regard whatsoever to distinction between the two religions. The petition to the King was necessary when I wrote about it, and is so still, for it was then our only hope, and it may now be taken as a proof that even to the last moment we were willing to show ourselves humble, devoted, and loyal. I expect nothing from it but that result; but that result itself is something."

" I fear, my son," said the old man, " that you have heard bad news since you wrote to me."

" The worst," replied the Count, with a melancholy shake of the head, " the very worst

that can be given. They intend, I understand from authority that cannot be doubted, to suppress entirely the free exercise of our religion in France, and to revoke the edict of our good King Henry which secured it to us."

The old man dropped the reins upon his mule's neck, and raised his eyes appealingly to heaven. "Terrible, indeed!" he said; "but I can scarcely credit it."

"It is but too true — but too certain!" replied the Count; "and yet terrible as this is — horrible, infamous, detestable as is the cruelty and tyranny of the act itself, the means by which it is to be carried into execution are still more cruel, tyrannical, and detestable."

The old man gazed in his face as if he had hardly voice to demand what those means were; but after a brief pause the Count went on: "To sum up all in one word, they intend to take the Protestant children from the Protestant mother, from the father, from the brother, and forbidding all intercourse, to place them in the hands of the enemies of our faith, to be educated in the superstitions that we abhor."

"God will avert it!" said the old man; "it cannot be that even the sins and the follies of him who now sits upon the throne of France

should deserve the signal punishment of being thus utterly given up and abandoned by the spirit of God to the tyrannical and brutal foolishness of his own heart. I cannot believe that it will ever be executed. I cannot believe that it will ever be attempted. I doubt not they will go on as they have begun ; that they will send smooth-faced priests with cunning devices, as they have done indeed since you went hence, to bribe and buy to the domination of Satan the weak and wavering of our flocks, and send lists of them to the King, to swell his heart with the pride of having made converts. I can easily conceive that they will be permitted to take from us places and dignities, to drive us by every sort of annoyance, so that the gold may be purified from the dross, the corn may be winnowed from the chaff. All this they will do, for all this undoubtedly we sinners have deserved. But I do not believe that they will be permitted to do more, and my trust is not in man but in God. For the sins that we have committed, for the weakness we have displayed, for murmurs and rebellion against his will, for sinful doubts and apprehensions of his mercy, from the earthliness of our thoughts, and the want of purity in all our dealings, God may

permit us to be smitten severely, terribly; but the fiery sword of his vengeance will not go out against his people beyond a certain point. He has built his church upon a rock, and there shall it stand; nor will I ever believe that the reformed church of France shall be extinguished in the land, nor that the people who have sought God with sincerity shall be left desolate. We will trust in him, my son ! We will trust in him !”

“ Ay,” said the Count ; “ but my excellent old friend, it now becomes our duty to think seriously what means, under God’s will, we may use in defence of his church. I myself have thought upon it long and eagerly, but I have thought of it in vain, for the subject is so difficult and so embarrassed, that without some one to counsel me, some one to aid me, I can fix upon no plan that offers even a probability of success. I must speak with you before to-morrow be over, long and earnestly. I know not why I should not turn to your dwelling with you even now,” he added ; “ I know not when I may be taken away from the midst of you, for much personal danger threatens myself. But, however, what I have to say must be said alone, and in private. The man Riquet is be-

hind, and though I believe he is faithful to me, and holds but loosely by his Popish creed, I must not trust too far. Let us turn towards your dwelling."

"Be it so, be it so," replied the old man; and wending on their way through the forest for some distance farther, they took the first road that turned to the right, and pursued the forest path that ran along through the bottom of the deep valleys, in which some part of the wood was scattered.

It had been a bright and a beautiful day, but the air was warm and sultry; and the horses of the Count looked more fatigued than might have been expected from so short a journey. The old clergyman and his young friend spoke but little more as they went along; and it was only to comment upon the tired condition of the horses, and the oppressive state of the atmosphere that they did so.

"It is as well, my son," said Claude de l'Estang at length, "it is as well that you have turned with me, for depend upon it we shall have a storm. Do you not see those large harsh masses of cloud rising above the trees?"

"I have remarked them some time," re-

plied the Count, “and twice I thought I saw a flash.”

“Hark!” exclaimed the clergyman, and there was evidently a sound of thunder not very distant. “Let us ride a little quicker,” the old man continued; “we are just coming to the slope of the hill where the wood ends, and then we are not far from Auron.”

The Count did as the pastor asked him, and the moment after they issued out from the wood, upon the shoulder of a gentle eminence, with green slopes declining, from either side of the road, into the valleys. A tall hill rose gradually to the left, along the side of which the highway was cut; and full in their view to the right,—but two or three miles on, across the valley, left by the eminence along which they rode—appeared the high conical hill of Auron, crowned, as we have before described it, with the little village spire.

Though there were some detached masses of cloud sweeping over the sky above them, and twisting themselves into harsh curious forms, the sun was still shining warm and strong upon the spot where they were, while the storm, the voice of which they had heard in the wood, was seen treading the valleys and hills beyond towards

Auron, wrapped in a mantle of dark vapours and shadows. The contrast between the bright sunshine and sparkling light around them, with the sweeping thunder clouds that were pouring forth their mingled wrath upon the beautiful country beyond, was very fine, and the Count drew in his horse for a moment to gaze upon it more at ease.

" You see, though they have been busy in seducing my flock, over there," said the pastor, fixing his eyes with a look of affection upon Auron, " you see they have still left me my spire to the church. I fear, not from any good will to me or mine," he added, " but because they say it acts as a sort of landmark at sea."

The Count made no reply, for he thought that the time was not far distant when that peaceful village would be the scene of persecution, if not of desolation, and the building where a quiet and industrious population had worshipped God for ages, according to the dictates of their own consciences, would be taken from them. His only answer then was a melancholy smile, as he rode slowly on again, still gazing on the village and the storm, the flashes of the lightning blazing across the path from time to time, as if the cloud from which they issued had

been close above the travellers. Scarcely, however, had the Count and his companion gone a hundred yards along the side of the hill, when a bright fitful line of intense light darted across the curtain of the dark cloud before their eyes, aimed like a fiery javelin cast by the unerring hand of the destroying angel at the pointed spire of the village church. The shape of the spire was instantly changed ; a part evidently fell in ruins ; and, the next moment, the whole of that which stood, blazed forth in flames, like a fiery beacon raised on the highest hill of an invaded land to tell that strife and bloodshed have begun.

“ It is accomplished ! ” cried the pastor, as he gazed upon the destruction of the spire. “ It is accomplished ! Oh, Albert, how natural is weakness and superstition to the human heart ! Can we see the fall of that building in which for many a long year our pure faith has offered up its prayers, unmixed with the vanities of a false creed, and not feel as if the will of God were against us — as if that were a sign unto us that his favour had past from us, at least in this land — as if it were a warning for us to gird ourselves, and, shaking off the dust of our feet, to seek another place of abiding ? ”

He paused not while he spoke, however, but rode on quickly, in order to aid and direct in saving any part of the building that yet remained; but as they went he still continued to pour forth many a sorrowful ejaculation, mingling, with personal grief for the destruction of an object which had for long years been familiar with his eye, and associated with every feeling of home, and peace, and of happy dwelling amongst his own people, and of high duties well performed, vague feelings of awe, and perhaps of superstition, as he read in that sight a warning, and a sign, and a shadowing forth of the Almighty will, that the church whereof he was a member was destined to destruction also.

Before the party reached the village, the spire had been completely consumed; but the peasantry had fortunately succeeded in preventing the fire from reaching the body of the building, and the rain was now pouring down in torrents, as the tears of an angel of wrath over the accomplishment of his painful mission; so that all that remained was to ascertain what damage had been done. Both the clergyman and the Count remarked several strangers standing round the church offering no assistance to any one, and only communing

together occasionally in a low voice on the proceedings of the Protestant population. Albert of Morseil gazed upon them with some surprise, and at length said, “ I think, gentlemen, you might have given some little aid and assistance in this matter.”

“ What !” cried one of the men, “ aid in upholding a temple of heretics ! What, keep from the destruction with which God has marked it, a building which man should long ago have pulled down !”

“ I did not know you, gentlemen,” replied the Count. “ There are some circumstances in which people may be expected to remember that they are fellow-men and fellow-Christians, before they think of sects or denominations.”

Thus saying, he turned and left them, accompanying Claude de l’Estang to his dwelling.

“ Never mind them, Albert, never mind them,” said the pastor as they walked along. “ These are the men who are engaged daily in seducing my flock. I have seen them more than once as I have been going hither and thither amongst the people ; but I have heeded them not, nor ever spoken to them. Those who can sell themselves for gold — and gold is the means of persuasion that they are now adopting — are not

steadfast or faithful in any religion, and are more likely to corrupt others, and to lead to great defection by falling away in a moment of need, than to serve or prop the cause to which they pretend to be attached. I trust that God's grace will reach them in time; but in a moment of increasing danger like this, I would rather that they showed themselves at once. I would rather, if they are to sell themselves either for safety or for gold, that they should sell themselves at once, and let us know them before the fiery ordeal comes. I would rather have to say, they went forth from us, because they were not of us, than think them children of light, and find them children of darkness."

"I fear," said the Count in a low voice, "I fear that they are waging the war against us, my good friend, in a manner which will deprive us of all unanimity. It is no longer what it was in former times, when the persecuting sword was all we had to fear and to resist. We have now the artful tongues of oily and deceitful disputants. We have all the hellish cunning of a sect which allows every means to be admissible, every falsehood, every misstatement, every perversion, every deceit, to be just, and right, and righteous, so that the object to be obtained is the

promotion of their own creed. Thus the great mass of the weak or the ill-informed may be affected by their teachers; while at the same time gold is held out to allure the covetous—the deprivation of rank, station, office, and emolument, is employed to drive the ambitious, the slothful, and the indifferent—and threats of greater severity of persecution, mental torture, insult, indignity, and even death itself, are held over the heads of the coward and the fearful."

They thus conversed as they went along, and the opinion of each but served to depress the hopes of the other more and more. Both were well acquainted with the spirit of doubt and disunion that reigned amongst the Protestants of France, a spirit of disunion which had been planted, fostered, and encouraged by every art that a body of cunning and unscrupulous men could employ to weaken the power of their adversaries. On arriving at the house of Claude de l'Estang, the pastor put into the hands of his young friend the petition to the King which he had drawn up, and which perfectly meeting his views, was immediately sent off for general signature, in order to be transmitted to Paris, and presented to the monarch. Long before it reached him, however, the final and

decisive blow had been struck, and, therefore, we shall notice that paper no more.

A long conversation ensued between the pastor and his young friend; and it was evident to the Count de Morseuil, that the opinions of Claude de l'Estang himself, stern and fervent as they had been in youth, now rendered milder by age, and perhaps by sorrow, tended directly to general and unquestioning submission, rather than to resistance: not indeed to the abandonment of any religious principle, not to the slightest sacrifice of faith, not to the slightest conformity of what he deemed a false religion. No; he proposed and he advised to suffer in patience for the creed that he held; to see even the temples of the reformed church destroyed, if such an extreme should be adopted; to see persons of the purer faith excluded from offices and dignity, and rank and emoluments; even to suffer, should it be necessary, plunder, oppression, and imprisonment itself, without yielding one religious doctrine; but at the same time without offering any resistance to the royal authority.

"But should they go still farther," said the Count, "should they attempt to interdict altogether the exercise of our religion; should

they take the child from the mother, the sister from the care of the brother ; should they force upon us Roman rites, and demand from us confessions of papistical belief, what are we to do then, my good old friend ?”

“ Our religious duties,” replied the pastor, “ we must not forbear to exercise, even if the sword hung over us that was to slay us at the first word. As for the rest, I trust and believe that it will not come to pass ; but if it should, there will be no choice left us but resistance or flight. Ask me not, Albert, to decide now upon which of the two we should choose. It must ever be a dark, a painful, and a terrible decision when the time comes that it is necessary to make it ; and perhaps the decision itself may be affected far more by the acts of others than by our own. We must determine according to circumstances ; but, in the mean time, let us as far as possible be prepared for either of the two painful alternatives. We must make great sacrifices, Albert, and I know that you are one of those who would ever be ready to make such for your fellow Christians. If we are driven to flee from the land of our birth, and to seek a home in other countries ; if by the waters of Babylon we must sit down and weep, thinking

of the Jerusalem that we shall never behold again, there will be many, very many of our brethren compelled to fly with but little means of support, and perhaps it may be long before in other lands they obtain such employment as will enable them to maintain themselves by the work of their own hands. Those who are richer must minister unto them, Albert. Luckily I myself can do something in that sort, for long ago, when there was no thought of this persecution, I sold what little land I had, intending to spend the amount in relieving any distress that I might see amongst my people, and to trust to the altar that I served for support in my old age. But little of this sum has been as yet expended, and if I did but know any hands in which I could trust it in a foreign land, either in England or in Holland, I would transmit it thither instantly. You too, Albert, if I have heard right, derived considerable wealth in money from some distant relation lately. For your own sake as well as others, it were better to place that in safety in foreign lands, for I find that it would be dangerous now to attempt to sell any landed possessions, and if you were forced to leave this country you might find

yourself suddenly reduced to want in the midst of strangers."

"I have not only thought of this before," replied the Count, "but I have already taken measures for transmitting that sum to Holland. As soon as I heard of the unjust prohibitions regarding the sale of lands by Protestants, I wrote to Holland to a banker whom I knew there in days of old, an honest man and a sincere friend, though somewhat too fond of gain. The sum I can thus transmit is far more than enough to give me competence for life, and if you please I can transmit thither the little store you speak of also."

"Willingly, willingly," replied the pastor; "it may be a benefit to others if not to me.—Albert," he added, "I shall never quit this land ! I feel it, I know it ! My ministry must be accomplished here till the last: and whether I shall be taken from you by some of the ordinary events of nature, or whether God wills it that I should seal with my blood the defence of my faith and my testimony against the church of Rome, I know not ; but I am sure, I feel sure, that I shall never quit the land in which I was born."

Albert of Morseil did not attempt to argue

with Claude de l'Estang upon this prejudice, for he knew it was one of those which, like some trees and shrubs, root themselves but the more firmly from being shaken, and from an ineffectual endeavour being made to pluck them out.

For nearly two hours the young Count remained at the house of the clergyman discussing all the various topics connected with their situation, while his servants were scattered about in different dwellings of the village. At the end of that time, however, Master Jerome Riquet made his appearance at the pastor's house, to inform his lord (from a participation in whose actions he judged he had been too long excluded) that the storm had passed away; and, ordering his horses to be brought up, after a few more words with Claude de l'Estang, the Count mounted and pursued his way homeward to the château of Morseuil.

Throwing his rein to the groom, the young nobleman walked on through the vestibule, and entered the great hall. It was calm and solitary, with the bright evening sunshine streaming through the tall windows and chequering the stone floor. Nothing was moving but a multitude of bright motes dancing in the sunbeam,

and one of the banners of the house of Morseuil shaken by the wind as the door opened and closed on the Count's entrance. The whole aspect of the place told that it had not been tenanted for some time. Every thing was beautifully clean indeed, but the tall-backed chairs ranged straight along the walls, the table standing exactly in the midst, the unsullied whiteness of the stone floor, not even marked with the print of a dog's foot, all spoke plainly that it had been long untenanted. The Count gazed round it in silent melancholy, marked the waving banner and the dancing motes, and, if we may use the term, the solemn cheerfulness of that wide hall; and then said to himself, ere he turned again to leave it,

“ Such will it be, and so the sun will shine, when I am gone afar — or in the grave.”

CHAPTER III.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WE will now lead the reader into another and very different scene from any of those into which we have as yet conducted him. It is a small but cheerful sitting-room, or parlour, in the house of a comfortable citizen of the town of Morseiul. There was every thing that could be required for comfort, and a little for show. The corner cupboard which protruded its round stomach into the room, like that of some fat alderman of the olden time, was ornamented with a variety of little gewgaws, and nick-nacks of silver, displayed in quaint array upon the shelves; and, besides several brass lamps and sconces wonderfully well polished, which were never lighted, were a number of articles of porcelain, of a kind which was then somewhat rare, and is now nearly invaluable. The two windows of this little parlour looked out upon the great square or market place, towards the southern corner of which it was situated, and commanded

a view of a large blacksmith's forge on the opposite side, close by the gate leading down to what was called the Count's road. There was a door out of this parlour, a black oaken door, with panels richly carved and ornamented, which appeared to lead into a room at the back, and another similar door at the side, opening into the passage which went straight through the house from the square into the garden behind.

At the table in the midst of this room—which table, at the moment we speak of, that is, half past eight o'clock in the morning, was decorated with a large pewter dish, containing a savoury ragout of veal, flanked by two bottles of cider and four drinking cups—sat the burly person of good Paul Virlay, the rich blacksmith, who, being well to do in the world, and enabled by competence to take his ease, had not yet gone out to superintend the work which his men were carrying on at the forge opposite.

Another effect of his easy situation in life was, that he had time to perform those necessary ablutions too much required by the faces and hands of all blacksmiths, but which, alas ! all blacksmiths are but too apt to neglect. It is true that, had he washed his face and hands for ever, or, after the prescribed rule of the Arabian Nights,

had scoured them “forty times with alkali, and forty times with the ashes of the same plant,” his face and hands would still have retained a certain glowing coppery brown hue, which they had acquired by the action of sun, and air, and fire, and hard work, and which they likewise possessed, it must be confessed, in some degree from nature.

At the table with Paul Virlay were three other personages. The first was his daughter, a sweet little girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age, and the second his wife, a goodly dame, perhaps two years or three years older than himself, and who, being terribly marked with the small-pox, had never possessed any beauty. Thus, at his marriage, Virlay, who had been in much request amongst the young ladies of Morseuil, declared that he had taken the good working horse instead of the jennet. She had always been extremely careful, laborious, active, and economical; somewhat given to smartness of apparel, indeed, but by no means to extravagance, and though decorating herself with black velvet riband, and large ornaments of gold, yet careful that the riband was not worn out too soon, and the gold ornaments neither bruised nor broken.

On her right hand, between herself and her

husband, sat the fourth person of the party, who was no other than the lady's brother, a stout, broad-made, determined-looking man, who had served long in the army under the Count; and had risen as high, by his daring courage and somewhat rash gallantry, as any person not of noble blood could rise, except under very extraordinary circumstances. He had accumulated, it was said, a considerable sum of money — perhaps not by the most justifiable of all dealings with the inhabitants of conquered districts — so that Armand Herval was an object of not a little attention, and what we may call cupidity, to the unmarried young ladies of Morseiul.

That town was not, indeed, his regular dwelling place, for his abode was at a small town nearer to the sea coast, some five or six miles off; but he frequently came to visit his sister and brother-in-law, over both of whom he exercised very considerable influence, although, as frequently is the case, the latter was naturally a man of much stronger natural sense than himself. It is in almost all instances, indeed, energy that gives power; and with persons not well educated, or not very highly endowed by nature, that energy loses none of its effect from approaching somewhat towards rashness. Such

then was the case with Paul Virlay and his brother-in-law. When unmoved by any strong passions, however, Armand Herval was quite the man to lead and to seduce. He was gay, blithe, cheerful, full of frolic, fearless of consequences, specious in reasoning, possessing much jest and repartee, overflowing with tales, or anecdotes, of what he had seen, or heard, or done in the wars; and it was only when crossed, or opposed, or excited by wine or anger, that the darker and more fiery spirit of the somewhat ruthless trooper would break forth and overawe those that surrounded him.

On the present morning there was a strange mixture in his demeanour of a sad and serious thoughtfulness, with gaiety and even merriment. He laughed and jested with his niece, he took a pleasure in teasing his sister, but he spoke, once or twice, in a low and bitter tone to Paul Virlay upon various matters which were taking place in the neighbourhood, and did not even altogether spare the Count de Morseil himself. At that, however, Virlay bristled up; and his brother-in-law, who had done it more from a spirit of teasing than aught else, only laughed at his anger, and turned the discourse to something else. He eat and drank

abundantly of the breakfast set before him; laughed at the cleanliness of Virlay's face and hands, and the smartness of his brown jerkin, and insisted that his little niece should run to the window to see whether the men were working properly, saying that her father was no longer fit for his trade.

The girl did as she was bid, and replied immediately, "I do not see the men at all, but I see the young Count just turning the corner."

"That is early," cried Virlay, laying down his fork. "Is he on horseback?"

"No, he is on foot," replied the girl, "and nobody with him."—"He is coming over here, I declare he is coming over here," cried the girl, clapping her hands.

"Nonsense," cried Virlay, starting up, as well as his wife and brother-in-law.

"Not nonsense at all, Paul," cried Herval. "He is making straight for the house, so I shall be off as fast as I can by the back door. I am not fond of making low bows, and standing with my hat in my hand, when I can help it."

"Stay, stay," cried Virlay; "do not go yet, Armand, I have much to talk with you about."

But his brother-in-law shook his head, and darted through the oak door we have mentioned, into the room beyond. Madame Virlay bestirred herself to give order and dignity to the breakfast table; but before she could accomplish that purpose the Count was in the open passage, and knocking at the door of the room for admission.

Virlay opened it immediately, and the young nobleman entered with that frank and graceful bearing which was part, indeed, of his inheritance, but which secured to him that hereditary love for his race which the virtues and kindness of his forefathers had established amongst the people.

“Good Morrow, Virlay,” he said. “Good Morrow, Madame Virlay! Oh, my pretty Margette, why you have grown so great a girl that I must call you so no longer, lest the people say that I am making love to you.—Virlay,” he added, in a graver tone, “I would fain speak a word or two with you on business. I would not send for you to the château for various reasons, but cannot we go into the next room for a moment or two?”

Virlay made a sign to his wife and daughter to retire, and placed a seat for the Count. “No,

my lord," he said, "you shall not give yourself that trouble. Shut the door, wife, and remember, no eves-dropping!"

"Bless thee, Paul," exclaimed his wife, bridling with a little indignation; "do you think I would listen to what my Lord Count says to you? I know better, I trust," and she shut the door.

Perhaps neither the Count, however, nor Virlay were quite certain of the lady's discretion under such circumstances, and they, therefore, both remained near the window, and conversed in low tones.

"I come to speak to you, Virlay," said the Count, in somewhat of a grave tone, "both as an influential man and as a sensible man—though he may have his little faults," he added, fixing his eyes somewhat meaningly upon the blacksmith's face, "and who may suffer himself to be a little too much led by others; but who, nevertheless, has the best intentions, I know, and who will always, sooner or later, remember that one must not do wrong that right may come of it."

The blacksmith replied nothing, but kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, though the red became somewhat deeper in his brown cheek, and

an expression of consciousness was to be seen in every feature of his countenance.

“ What I want to speak with you about is this,” continued the Count: “ since I have been away, during this last campaign, there has sprung up, it seems, a dangerous band in this part of the province; consisting of men who are carrying on a system of violence, depredation, and intimidation, which must be put a stop to. What I want to consult with you in regard to, is the best means of putting down this band, for put down I am determined it shall be, and that right speedily.”

“ You will not be able to put them down, my lord !” replied the blacksmith. “ If mere simple plunder were the object of these persons, the thing would be easily done. You would have the whole people to aid you, and nothing would be more easy. But, my lord, such is not the case. The men may plunder — I do not say that it is not so — but they only plunder their enemies. It has always been so in this part of the country, as the good Count, your father, well knew, and always will be so to the end of the world. People have given these bands different names, at different times, and from different circumstances. Once they were called *les*

Faucons, because, at that time, the minister was sending down men into the country, taxing the salt and the fish, and when any of them came, one of these bands stooped upon him, like a falcon, carried him off, and he was never heard of more. At another time they were called *les Eperviers*, the hawks, because they hovered over all the country and caught what they could. That was the time when the King sent down so many soldiers, that they could not carry off the collectors without hovering round them for a long time. Now they call them *les Chauve-souris*, or the bats, because they fly about just at the setting-in of night, and woe be to the persecuting Papist that falls in their way. To-morrow, if obliged to do the work later at night, they may be called *les Hiboux*, or the owls; and the time may come, perhaps, when they will be called *les Loups* or *les Chouettes*, the wolves or the screech-owls: but they will do no harm to any one but their enemies. An honest man, who seeks to harm nobody, may go from one end of the province to another,—ay, and through all Brittany, too, as well as Poitou, without meeting with the least annoyance. But if it be different, if he be an oppressor of the people, a seller of men's souls, let him see that he travels

by daylight only, and even then he wo'n't be very safe."

"I do not know," said the Count, "that I am either an oppressor of the people, or a buyer and seller of men's souls; and yet, my good friend Virlay, these Chauve-souris, as you call them, fastened their claws upon me, and put me to no slight inconvenience and discomfort. They might have shot me, too, for they fired right at my horse. You may have heard of all this before, I dare say," he added, with a smile.

The blacksmith did not reply for a moment; but then he said, "I dare say, my lord, it was some mistake. I doubt not that they did not know you; or that some foolish fellow, as will happen sometimes, went beyond his orders."

"But then again," said the Count, "they both attacked and plundered two ladies, defenceless women, who could have given them no offence."

"Some hangers-on of a governor that was sent down to oppress the province," replied the blacksmith. "These bands, my lord, know all that's passing through the country better than you do yourself."

"But in this instance," said the Count, "they certainly knew not what they were

about, for instead of a governor sent down to oppress the province, Monsieur de Rouvré is the very man to stand between the province and oppression, and, from all I hear, is likely to give up the post and the court, and retire to Ruffigny, if the measures of the council are what he judges unfair towards us."

"If he do that," said the blacksmith, "he will have a better body guard at Ruffigny than ever he had at Poitiers. But what is it you want me to do, Monsieur le Comte? I have no power to put down these bands. I have no sway with them or against them."

"What I want you to do," replied the Count, "is to use your whole power and influence in every way, to put a stop to a system which cannot be suffered to go on. Sorry should I be to draw the sword against these mistaken people, but I must have them no more on the lands and lordships of Morseiul, where they have quartered themselves I find during my absence. I must have my forests free of such deer, and you know, Virlay, when I say a thing I will keep my word. I have been in their hands, and they were civil to me, respected my person, did something towards obeying my directions; and, although I know two of them, however well

concealed they might be," he added, laying strong emphasis on the words, "I will in no degree betray the knowledge I acquired. I only wish to make it fully understood, that I wish this band to be dispersed. I am well aware of the evil custom that you allude to, and how deeply it has rooted itself in the habits of the people; but I tell you, Virlay, that this is likely to produce more evil to the cause of the reformed church than any thing that could be devised. At all events, it is contrary altogether to the laws of the land, and to civil order, and whatever be the pretext, I will not tolerate it on my lands. I wish the bands to be dispersed, the night meetings to be abandoned, the men to pursue their lawful employments, and in other hours to take their necessary rest. But, at all events, as I have said before, within my jurisdiction they shall not remain. If they go to the lands of other lords, I cannot of course help it; but I trust that those other lords will have spirit and decision enough to drive them off their territories. Let us say no more about it, Virlay. You understand me distinctly, and know my whole meaning; and now, let me know when, and how, I may best obtain a meet-

ing with a person called Brown Keroual, for I must make him hear reason also."

The blacksmith paused for two or three minutes before he answered. "Why, my lord," he said at length, "I ought not to tell you anything about him, perhaps, by that name. On all accounts, perhaps I ought not; but yet I know I can trust you; and I am sure you will take no advantage. So I'll only ask you one thing, not to go down to where he is, with too many people about you, for fear of bad consequences if there should be any of his folks about."

"I shall go down," said the Count, "towards the place where I hear he is generally to be met with, with only two servants; and when I come near enough, I shall give the horse to the servants, and walk forward on foot."

"You will be as safe as in your own château, then," said the blacksmith; "but you must not go for a couple of days, as where he will be tomorrow, and next day, I cannot tell. But if, on the day after, you will be just at the hour when the bat begins to flit, at a little turn of the river about six miles down.— You know the high rock just between the river and the forest, with

the tall tree upon it, which they call the *chêne vert* — ”

“ I know it well. I know it well,” said the Count. “ But on which side of the rock do you mean? the tall face flanks the river, the back slopes away towards the wood.”

“ At the back, at the back,” replied the blacksmith. “ Amongst the old hawthorns that lie scattered down the slope. You will find him there at the hour I mention.”

“ I will be there,” said the Count in reply, “ and I will allow the intervening time for the band to quit the woods of Morseuil. But if it have not done so by the morning after, there will be a difference between us, which I should be sorry for.”

Thus saying, the Count left the worthy townsman, and took his way back to the château.

In the two days that intervened, nothing occurred to vary the course of his existence. He entertained some expectation of receiving letters from Poitiers, but none arrived. He heard nothing from the governor, from the Chevalier d'Evran, or from Clémence de Marly; and from Paris, also, the ordinary courier brought no tidings for the young Count. A lull had come over the tempestuous season of his days, and

we shall now follow him on his expedition to the *chêne vert*, under which, be it said, we have ourselves sat many an hour thinking over and commenting upon the deeds we now record.

The Count, as he had said, took but two servants with him, and rode slowly on through the evening air, with his mind somewhat relieved by the absence of any fresh excitement, and by the calm refreshing commune of his spirit with itself. On the preceding day there had been another thunder storm ; but the two which had occurred had served to clear and somewhat cool the atmosphere, though the breath of the air was still full of summer.

When at the distance of about a mile and a half from the spot which the blacksmith had indicated, the Count gave his horse to his servants, and bade them wait there for his return. He wandered on slowly, slackening his pace as much to enjoy the beauty and brightness of the scene around, as to let the appointed time arrive for his meeting with the leader of the band we have mentioned. When he had gone on about a hundred yards, however, he heard in the distance the wild but characteristic notes of a little instrument, at that time, and even in the present day, delighted in throughout Poitou, and known

there by the pleasant and harmonious name of the musette. Sooth to say, it differs but little, though it does in a degree, from the ordinary bagpipe ; and yet there is not a peasant in Poitou, and scarcely a noble of the province either, who will not tell you that it is the sweetest and most harmonious instrument in the world. It requires, however, to be heard in a peculiar manner, and at peculiar seasons : either, as very often happens in the small towns of that district, in the dead of the night, when it breaks upon the ear as the player walks along the street beneath your window, with a solemn and plaintive melody, that seems scarcely of the earth ; or else in the morning and evening tide, heard at some little distance amongst the hills and valleys of that sunny land, when it sounds like the spirit of the winds, singing a wild ditty to the loveliness of the scene.

The Count de Morseuil had quite sufficient national, or perhaps we should say provincial, feeling to love the sound of the musette ; and he paused to listen, as, with a peculiar beauty and delicacy of touch, the player poured on the sounds from the very direction in which he was proceeding. He did not hasten his pace, however, enjoying it as he went ; and still the

nearer and nearer he came to the *chéne vert*, the closer he seemed to approach to the spot whence the sounds issued. It is true the player could not see him, as he came in an oblique line from the side of the water, to which at various places the wood approached very near. But the moment that the Count turned the angle of the rock which we have mentioned, and on the top of which stood the large evergreen oak, from which it took its name, he beheld a group which might well have furnished a picture for a Phyllis and a Corydon to any pastoral poet that ever penned an idyl or an eclogue.

Seated on a little grassy knoll, under one of the green hawthorns, was a girl apparently above the common class, with a veil, which she seemed to have lately worn over her head, cast down beside her, and with her dark hair falling partly upon her face as it bent over that of a man, seated, or rather stretched, at her feet, who, supporting himself on one elbow, was producing from the favourite instrument of the country the sounds which the Count had heard.

Lying before them, and turning its sagacious eyes from the face of the one to the face of the other, was a large rough dog, and the girl's

hand, which was fair and small, was engaged in gently caressing the animal's head as the Count came up. So occupied were they with each other, and so full were the tones of the music, that it was the dog who first perceived the approach of a stranger, and bounded barking forward towards the Count, as if the young nobleman were undoubtedly an intruder. The girl and her lover—for who could doubt that he was such?—both rose at the same time, and she, casting her veil over her head, darted away with all speed towards the wood, while her companion called after her, “Not far, not far.”

The Count then perceived, somewhat to his surprise, that the veil she wore was that of a novice in a convent. Notwithstanding the barking of the dog, and the somewhat fierce and uncertain aspect of his master, the Count advanced with the same slow, steady pace, and in a minute or two after was standing within five steps of Armand Herval. That good personage had remained fixed to his place, and for sometime had not recognised the young Count; but the moment he did so, a change came over his countenance, and he saluted him with an air of military respect.

“Good day, Armand,” said the Count, “I

am afraid I have disturbed your young friend ; but pray go after her, and tell her that I am neither spy nor enemy, so she need not be alarmed. Come back and speak to me, however, for I want a few minutes' conversation with you. — Have you seen your brother-in-law Virlay, lately ?”

“ Not for several days,” replied Armand ; “ but I will go after her, my Lord, and see her safe, and come back to you in a minute.”

“ Do so,” replied the Count, “ and I will wait for you here. Will you not stay with me, good dog ?” he added, patting the dog’s head and casting himself down upon the ground ; but the dog followed his master, and the Count remained alone, thinking over the little picture which had been so unexpectedly presented to his eyes.

“ This lets me into much of the history,” he thought. “ Here is a motive and an object both for accumulating wealth and intimidating the Papists ! But how can he contrive to get the girl out of a convent to sit with him here, listening to him playing the musette, while it is yet the open day ? It is true, we are at a great distance from any town or village. The only religious house near, either, is that upon the hill two miles farther down. Though I cannot

prevent this business, I must give him some caution ;” and then he set himself to think over the whole affair again, and to endeavour to account for an event which was less likely perhaps to take place in that province, in the midst of a Protestant population, than in any other part of France.

Some time passed ere Armand Herval returned, and by this time the twilight was growing thick and grey.

“ It is later than I thought, Herval,” said the young Count, rising from the ground, on which he had been stretched, as the other came up ; “ I shall hardly have time to say all I had to say, even if the person were here that I came to converse with.”

“ Then you did not come to see me, my Lord ?” demanded Herval, in a tone perhaps expressive of a little mortification.

“ No, Herval,” replied the Count with a slight smile, “ I came to see a person called Brown Keroual : but,” he added, after a moment’s pause, “ if you are likely to stay here, I will leave the message with you.”

The Count stopped as if for a reply, and his companion answered, “ Speak, speak, my Lord

Count! Your message shall not fail to reach him."

" Well then, Armand," replied the nobleman, " tell Keroual this for me: first, that I know him — that I recognised him the moment he spoke when last we met; but that having some regard for him, I do not intend to take any advantage whatever of that knowledge to his prejudice, although he be engaged in wrong and unlawful deeds. However, I came here to meet him, in order to reason with him on his conduct, for he is a good and a gallant soldier, and would now have been an officer — for I recommended him for advancement — had it not been for that plundering of the priory of St. Amand, which was thrown in my teeth by Monsieur de Louvois whenever I mentioned his name."

" If Louvois had been in it," replied his companion, " it would not have escaped half as well as it did; for I think, according to the very doctrines of their popish church, the good act of burning one Louvois would be quite enough to obtain pardon for the sin of burning a whole score of monks along with him. But what were you going to say farther, sir?"

"Why, to Brown Keroual," continued the Count, "I was going to say, that he is engaged in a matter contrary to all law and order, heading a band of robbers which must be ——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Herval somewhat impatiently, "not robbers! If you please, a band of *chauve-souris*. They rob no man: they only plunder the enemy; and let me tell you, my Lord Count, that there is many a man more or less joined with that band, who would just as soon think of robbing another as you would.—Has any thing been asked for the ring, though it was the ring of a Papist? Was not the money that was taken from you restored?"

"It was," replied the Count; "but we must not be too nice about our terms, Herval. I do not know any law, human or divine, that allows a man to pick and choose at his own will and pleasure whom he will rob, and whom he will murder."

"Ay, my noble Lord," answered the man, getting warm; "but there is a law of nature, which, after all, is a law of God, and which not only justifies but requires us to destroy him who would destroy us; and, whether it be straightforwardly that he is seeking our destruction, or by cunning and crooked paths, it matters

not, we have a right to prevent him by every means in our power, and if we catch hold of him, to knock him on the head like a viper or any other noxious vermin."

"In all cases but direct attack," answered the Count, "civil society gives our defence into the hands of the law."

"But when the law and its ministers are leagued with the destroyers, with the real plunderers, with the real disturbers of the public peace," exclaimed the man vehemently, "we must make a new law for ourselves, and be its officers also."

The Count did not interrupt him, as he was very well pleased to be made acquainted clearly with all the views and opinions of that body of men whom Armand Herval might be supposed to represent; and the soldier went on with great volubility, and some eloquence, to defend the right of resistance with all the well-known arguments upon the subject, which have been repeated and combated a thousand times; but he came not a bit nearer than any who had gone before him to the real question at issue, namely, where the duty of submission ceased and the right of resistance began. We must remember that not only the higher orders, but also the

lower classes of French Protestants were at that time much more generally enlightened and accustomed to the use of their own reason, than the Catholics, and the natural consequence of any attempt to oppress them, was to render such arguments as those used by Herval, very common amongst them. Neither was the Count de Morseuil prepared to oppose the general scope of the man's reasoning, though he was determined to resist the practical misapplication of it, which was then actively going on in the province.

"I will not argue with you, Herval," he said, "nor will I attempt to persuade you that what the council is doing now, and may do against us poor Protestants, is right, feeling it as I do to be wrong. But, nevertheless, I think — nay, I am sure — that such proceedings, as those of the band we speak of, are perfectly incompatible with our duty to the King and our fellow-subjects, and likely to produce infinitely greater evil to the reformed religion than good. The existence of such bands will give an excuse for sending a large military force into the province, for persecuting the Protestants still farther, and for taking such precautions that even, if a crisis were to come, in which the resistance to oppres-

sion which you speak of were necessary, it would be rendered hopeless by the prepared state of the enemy. In the mean time it is wrong, because, at the best, it is carrying on what you call hostilities without a declaration of war ; it is dangerous to the peaceful even of our own friends, as has been shown in my case, and in that of two ladies of the governor's family, who is most warmly interested in our behalf; and it is degrading a powerful and just cause in the eyes of all men, by giving its supporters the air of night plunderers."

" As for a declaration of war," replied Herval, " they have made that themselves by their own acts, and as to the rest of what you say, sir, there are objections certainly. Did I but see our noblemen like yourself, and our ministers preparing a good resistance to tyranny and injustice, I would be as quiet as a lamb. But I see nothing of the kind ; you are all sitting still in your houses, and waiting till they come to cut your throats. So as there must and shall be resistance of some kind, and it must begin by the lower instead of the higher, we must even take the lesser of two evils, and go on as we have done."

Armand Herval spoke, as was common with

him when at all heated, with very little reverence or respect in his tone ; but Albert of Morseuil was not of a character to suffer himself to be irritated in the slightest degree by any want of formal respect. No man knew better how to preserve his own dignity without making any exaction, and he accordingly replied, with perfect calmness, —

“ I should be sorry, Armand, that our good friend Brown Keroual should persist in conduct which may make a division amongst different classes of the Protestants, at the very moment that we require union for our common safety. You will therefore let him know at once, that I am determined, upon my own lands, to put an end to this system ; that my forest and my moors shall no longer hold these *chauve-souris*. The day after to-morrow I shall begin my operations, and as I know the country as well as any man in it, shall have no difficulty in putting my plans in execution. Keroual knows me for a man of my word, and I must not have one single man disguised and in arms any where within my jurisdiction at the end of three days from this time.”

The man smiled with a grim but less dissatisfied look than the Count had expected.

"They none of them wish to give you offence, sir," he replied, "and can easily move off your lands to others."

"That they *must* do," replied the Count, "but there is something more still to be said. When once off my lands, they may doubtless consider that the matter is at an end; but such is not the case."

"My Lord, if you follow us off your lands," said Armand, dropping farther disguise, and making use of the pronoun of the first person, "if you follow us off your own lands, you must take the consequences."

"I am always prepared to do so," replied the Count. "My purpose is not of course to follow any of you off my own lands, unless I am summoned to do so; but if I am summoned, which will immediately be the case if there be any renewal of outrages whatsoever, I shall most assuredly use my whole power, and employ my whole means, to put down that which I know to be wrong."

The man to whom he spoke gazed sternly upon the ground for a moment or two, and seemed to be struggling with various contending feelings. "Come, my Lord Count," he said at length, "I will tell you what. Every

one who has served under you knows that you are as brave a man, as kind an officer, and as skilful a commander as any that ever lived, and we are all willing to do what we can to please you in your own way. If you would put yourself at our head, there is not a man amongst us that would not follow you to death itself. — No, but hear me out, my Lord ; don't answer till you have heard. — We get quicker information than even you can get, for with us it flies from mouth to mouth like lightning. We have no long written letters, but as soon as a thing is known, one man tells it to another, and so it comes down here. Now we know what most likely you don't know, that every thing is settled in Paris for putting down the reformed religion altogether. We know, too, which I see you don't know, that the Duc de Rouvré has received orders from the court to resign the government of the province, and retire to Ruffigny, without presenting himself at the court. Now depend upon it, my Lord, before a fortnight be over, you will have to rouse yourself against this oppression, to make the voice of remonstrance heard in firmer tones, and with arms in your hand. You know it as well as I do, and I know you are no more afraid of doing it than I am ; but only, like all the rest

of the people about the court, you have gone mad concerning a thing called loyalty, and have got your head filled with ideas of respect and veneration for the King — simply because he is the King and wears a crown — when if the truth were known, he is not so much worthy of respect and veneration as any of our peasants who drive a team of oxen, with a whip of sheep leather, from one end of the field to the other. A selfish, voluptuous, adulterous tyrant — ”

“ Hush, hush,” exclaimed the Count, “ I can neither stay nor hear, if you proceed in such terms as those.”

“ Well, well,” said the man, “ though what I say is true, and you know it, my Lord Count, I wo’n’t go on if it offends you. But what I was going to say besides is this. You have got your head filled with these ideas; you wish to do every thing respectfully and loyally; you wish to show the most profound respect for the law, and be compelled to resist before you do resist. But are our enemies doing the same towards us? Are they showing any respect for the law, or for justice, or good faith, honour, honesty, or treaties? No, no, they are taking step by step, and ruining us piecemeal! My Lord, you are like a man in a fortress, with a truce between him and

a perfidious enemy, who takes advantage of his good nature to get possession of one outpost after another, then marches over the glacis, lodges himself on the counterscarp, erects his batteries, points his cannon, and says, ‘ Now, surrender, or I’ll blow you to pieces ! ’ This is what you are suffering to be done, my Lord; and, at one word, if you, Count, will come and put yourself at our head to resist oppression, you shall have two hundred men at one whistle ; and ere five days be over you shall have two thousand ; before ten days ten thousand. Will you do it ? ”

“ Undoubtedly not,” replied the Count. “ Were the time to come that all other means having failed, I should be forced to stand upon my own defence, and the defence of my fellow Protestants, I would openly plant my banner on the hill of Morseiul, stand upon the straightforward justice of my cause, point to the unvarying loyalty of my life, and demand simple justice for myself and my brethren.”

“ And you would find all confusion and consternation in your own party,” replied the man, “ not a skeleton even of a regiment ready to support you, the timid abandoning you, and the brave unprepared. You would find, on the other side, the enemy upon you before

you knew where you were ; instead of justice you would get persecution, and, before a fortnight was over, your head would be rolling about the Place de Grève. Well, well, be it so ! — I will help you yet, my Lord, whether you like it or not, and when the day of danger comes, you may find Brown Keroual and his band nearer to your hand than you imagine. In the mean time, we will keep as quiet as may be. But if you hear of a few Jesuits and Lazarites being hung, you must not be surprised, that's all.— Have you any thing farther to say to me, my Lord ? for it is now quite dark ; and, like a sober peaceable man," he added with a laugh, " I must be going home to supper. One or two of my companions may come to fetch me, too."

" I have nothing farther to say, Armand," replied the Count, " except, perhaps, it were a word of caution about that young person I saw with you just now ; and who, I must say, I was sorry to see with you."

" Why, my Lord, why ?" demanded the man quickly ; " you don't suppose I would do her hurt. I would not injure her, so help me God ! for the whole world. If you had not come up, I should have taken her back in five minutes."

" I do not suppose you would wrong her,

Herval," said the Count, " by no means do I suppose such a thing ; but she out here with you, with a novice's veil on ! She is evidently some Roman Catholic girl in a monastery, and I would have you cautious on that account."

" Oh, my lord," replied the man, " the time for caution is all over now. We are soon coming to a setting to rights of all those things. Quiet cannot be kept up above a fortnight longer, and then the doors of more than one convent will be as wide open as the sea. One of three things must then happen. We shall either have established our rights, and my little novice will be out of her fetters; or we shall be defeated and I killed, and that matter over ; or defeated, yet living and flying away with her, pretty soul, to some country where we may be united in peace."

" Yes, yes," replied the Count; " but you do not reflect what you may bring upon her head in the mean time. She may be removed from that convent to another, where you can never reach her. If these wanderings with you are detected, she may be subjected too to punishments and penances, such as you have no idea of."

The man laughed aloud. " No fear, my Lord, no fear," he said ; " the good mothers dare no

more send her away than they dare lose their right hand. They would fancy the convent in flames the very first night she slept out of it. Why, she is their guardian angel, at least so they think ; and she is specially appointed to bring their tribute, consisting of a silver crown and a flask of wine, twice in the week to Brown Keroual, in virtue of which they obtain his protection against all bands and companies whatsoever. The only stipulation they made when the tribute was demanded, was, that he was on no account to tell the director; and when the director, who is a greater old woman than any one amongst them, heard it in confession, he added, a fifteen sous piece once a week for himself, with no other stipulation than that Brown Keroual was not to tell the Bishop ; so that twice in the week the dear child brings me the tribute — ay, and the real tribute, for which I sought, of her own sweet company. Nobody dares watch her, nobody dares follow her; and as she is always absent the same time, and always back again before the bat's wing is to be seen flitting in the air, they ask no questions, but judging the distance long, exempt her from vespers, that she may accomplish it more easily. And now, my Lord Count," he continued, " I must leave you, for my people

will be waiting for me. I think where we now stand is off your lordship's ground, for I could not well give up this meeting place. But farther than this, I shall not come, till the time when you shall be very willing to thank Brown Keroual for his help."

The Count made no reply to his words, but wishing him good night, he left him, and rejoined his servants. He then rode quickly homeward, but was somewhat surprised, as he climbed the steep towards the castle, to see a full blaze of light pouring through the windows of the lesser hall. On entering the gates, however, he saw several horses and servants in the liveries of the Chevalier d'Evran, and found his friend seated at supper in the hall above.

" You see, Albert," said the Chevalier, rising and grasping his hand as he came in, " you see what liberties I take, and what account I make of your friendship. Here I come, and order all sorts of viands without ceremony, simply because I have ridden hard and am desperately an hungred."

His countenance was frank and open, though not perhaps so cheerful in its expression as usual; his manner was free and unembarrassed, and seemed not as if any thing that had occurred

at Poitiers would have the slightest tendency to diminish the friendship and intimacy that existed between him and the Count. Albert of Morseiul, however, could not feel exactly the same. He could not divest his mind of a vague feeling of jealous disquietude in regard to the confident intimacy which seemed to exist between the Chevalier d'Evran and Clémence de Marly. However hopeless might be his own love towards her—however much he might have taught himself that despair was in his case wisdom—however strong might be his resolutions to resist every temptation to seek her society any more, there was something painful to him that he could not overcome, in the idea of the Chevalier being constantly at her side; and although his regard and affection for his friend were not diminished, yet there was an unpleasant feeling at his heart when he saw him, which perhaps might make some difference in his manner.

“ Many thanks for doing so, Louis,” he answered, struggling hard against his own feelings, “ many thanks for doing so. What news bring you from Poitiers?”

The Chevalier did not appear to feel any difference in the manner of his friend, and re-

plied, “ But little news, Albert, and that not good. I was but one day in Poitiers before I set off in haste. I found every thing in confusion and derangement. The states split into factions; the governor, the intendant, and the bishop, at open war with each other; cabals of the basest and blackest character going on in every quarter of the town; good Madame de Rouvré wishing her husband any thing but a governor; and Clémence de Marly looking pale, ill, and sorrowful. I stayed but a sufficient time,” he continued, not giving the Count an opportunity to make any observations, “ I stayed but a sufficient time to make myself thoroughly acquainted with all that was proceeding, and then set off at once for the purpose of proceeding to Paris with all speed. I came to spend two or three hours with you, Albert, at the most, for I must hurry on without delay. The King, you know, is my godfather, and I trust that my representation of what is taking place at Poitiers may do some good. If it do not, de Rouvré is ruined, and a most pitiful intrigue triumphant.”

“ I trust in Heaven that you may be successful,” replied the Count; “ but proceed with your supper, d’Evran.”

"I will, I will," replied the Chevalier, "but will you let me give you one more proof of how much at home I can make myself in your house, by giving an order to your servants?"

"Most assuredly," replied the Count; "you have nothing to do but to speak."

"It is this, then," said the Chevalier; "you will be good enough, Master Jerome Riquet, to make all these worthy gentlemen who are assisting you to serve my supper march out of the room in single file. Now come, Master Riquet, do it in an officer-like way. You have seen service, I know."

Riquet seemed well pleased at the honourable task conferred upon him, and according to the Chevalier's direction made the servants troop out of the room one by one, he himself preparing to remain as a confidential person to serve the Count and his friend during the conversation which he doubted not was to ensue. The Chevalier, however, as soon as he saw himself obeyed so far, again raised his voice, saying,—

"Now, Master Riquet, you have executed the manœuvre so well, that it is a pity your men should be without their officer. You will be good enough to follow them."

Riquet made a sort of semi-pirouette on the tips of his toes, and disappointed, though perhaps not surprised, marched out of the room, and shut the door.

"Albert," said the Chevalier, as soon as he was gone, "I am afraid, very much afraid, that all is lost for the cause of you Huguenots. There are people about the King, who must be mad to counsel him as they do. All the news I have, which perhaps you know already, is as sad as it can be. There wants but one more step to be taken for the utter abolition of what you call the reformed religion in France—I mean the abolition of the privileges granted by the edict of Nantes—and perhaps that step will be taken before I can reach Paris."

"So quickly?" exclaimed the Count.

"Even so!" rejoined his friend. "All the mad-like steps which have been taken by the council have been applauded by one general roar of the whole clergy of France. Petition after petition has come in from every Catholic body through the land, beseeching the King to do you every sort of injustice, and I feel convinced that they are persuading him, while he is risking a civil war, ruining his provinces, and exasperating some of his most faithful subjects,

that he is acting justly, politicly and religiously, and is, in short, a saint upon earth, notwithstanding all his mistresses. I pretend to no power over the King or influence with him, except inasmuch as I can often say to him, in my wild rambling way, things that nobody else could say, and dare to tell him under the same cloak many an unpleasant fact that others will not tell him. However, my object now is to open his eyes about de Rouvré, to whom I am too deeply bound by ties of gratitude to see him injured and calumniated, if I can help it. I would fain ask you, Albert, what you intend to do, how you intend to act, when these rash measures are pushed to the extreme against you; but yet it is unfair to give you the pain of refusing me, and perhaps unwise to seek a share in secrets which I ought not to know, or, knowing, to reveal."

" As far as any thing has yet passed," replied the Count, " there is nothing either to conceal or to reveal, Louis. It will be difficult for the King to tire out my loyalty. I am determined to bear to the very utmost. What I shall do when the very utmost bound of endurance is passed I do not know, having as yet settled nothing in my own mind."

"I cannot think," continued the Chevalier, "that the King will individually treat you ill, who have served him so well; but with regard to your religion, depend upon it the utmost extremes are determined upon already."

"I grieve to hear it," replied the Count, "but it is not more than I expected. The rapidity of these measures gives no time for calm and loyal remonstrance or petition to make the King aware of the real truth."

"Such is indeed the case," said the Chevalier. "Couriers are arriving at Poitiers and taking their departure again five or six times in the day, killing the horses on the road, setting off fat men themselves and returning thin.—I know this is no joking matter, Albert, and I am anxious to do what little good I can. I am therefore going to follow the example of these couriers, and as soon as I have seen the King, and obtained some satisfaction on these matters, I shall return hither with all speed to watch the progress of events, and if possible to shield and protect my friends. In this quarter of the world," he added, holding out his hand to the Count with a frank smile, "in this quarter of the world are all those for whom I entertain any very sincere affection; de Rouvré, who has

befriended me from my youth, and never lost an opportunity of serving me ; you, Albert, who have been my companion for many years in perils and dangers, to whom I owe the immense benefit of a good example, and the no less inestimable blessing of a noble mind to communicate with under all circumstances.”

“ And Clémence de Marly,” said the Count, with a melancholy smile, “ of course you will add Clémence de Marly, Chevalier.”

“ Assuredly,” replied the Chevalier, “ assuredly, Albert, I will add Clémence de Marly. I will not ask you, Albert, why you look at me reproachfully. Clémence, I believe from my heart, loves you, and I scruple not to tell you so. If it were not for the cursed obstacle of your religion, you might both be happy. That is a terrible obstacle, it is true; but were it not for that — I say — you might both be happy, and your example and her love for you might do away the only faults she has, and make her to you a perfect angel, though there is not one other man in France, perhaps, whom she could endure or render happy. She also, and her fate, are amongst the objects of my journey to Paris; but of that I shall tell you nothing till I can tell you all.”

"I know you are a man of mysteries," said the Count with a faint smile, "and therefore I suppose I must neither attempt to investigate this, nor to enquire how it is, that the gay and gallant Chevalier d'Evran is in one way insensible to charms which he is so sensible of in other respects."

"You are right, Albert, not to make any such attempt," replied the Chevalier. "With respect to love for Clémence, a thousand causes may have produced the peculiar feelings I entertain towards her. I may *have loved* and been cured."

The Count made no reply, but fell into a reverie; and after gazing on him for a minute or two the Chevalier added, "You, Albert, love her, and are not cured."

His friend, however, was still silent, and, changing the conversation, the Chevalier talked of indifferent things, and did not return to subjects of such painful interest, till midnight came, and he once more took his departure from the château of Morseiul.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PREACHING IN THE DESERT.

AGAIN we must pass over a brief space of time, and also somewhat change the scene, but not very far. In the interval, the acts of a bigoted and despotic monarch had been guided by the advice of cruel and injudicious ministers, till the formal prohibition of the opening of any Protestant place of worship throughout France for the service of God, according to the consciences of the members of the reformed church, had been proclaimed throughout the land. Such had been the change, or rather the progress, made in that time; and the falling off of many leading Protestants, the disunion which existed amongst others, the overstrained loyalty of some, and the irresolution of many, had shown to even the calmer and the firmer spirits, who might still have conducted resistance against tyranny to a successful result, that though, perhaps, they might shed oceans of blood, the Protestant cause in France was lost, at least for the time.

The scene, too, we have said, was changed.

It was no longer the city of Poitiers, with its multitudes and its gay parties ; it was no longer the château, with its lord and his attendants ; it was no longer the country town, with its citizens and its artizans ; but it was upon one of those dark brown moors of which so many are to be found on the borders of Brittany and Poitou, under the canopy of heaven alone, and with nothing but the bleakest objects in nature round about.

The moor had a gentle slope towards the westward. It was covered with gorse and heath, interspersed with old ragged hawthorns, stunted and partly withered, as we often see, some being brought up in poverty and neglect, never knowing care or shelter, stinted and sickly, and shrivelling with premature decay. Cast here and there amongst the thorns, too, were large masses of rock and cold grey stone, the appearance of which in that place was difficult to account for, as there was no higher ground around from which such masses could have fallen. A small wood of pines had been planted near the summit of the ground, but they, too, had decayed prematurely in that ungrateful soil ; and though each tree presented here and there some scrubby tufts of dark

green foliage, the principal branches stood out, white and blasted, skeleton fingers pointing in despairing mockery at the wind that withered them.

The hour was about six o'clock in the evening, and as if to accord with the earth below it, there was a cold and wintry look about the sky which the season did not justify; and the long blue lines of dark cloud, mingled with streaks of yellow and orange towards the verge of heaven, seemed to bespeak an early autumn. There was one little pond in the foreground of the picture sunk deep amongst some banks and hawthorn bushes, and looking dark and stern as every thing around it. Flapping up from it, however, scared by the noise of a horse's feet, rose a large white stork, contrasting strangely with the dim shadowy waters.

The person that startled the bird by passing nearer to him than any body else had done, rode forward close by the head of the pond to a spot about three hundred yards farther on, where a great multitude of people were assembled, perhaps to the number of two thousand. He was followed by several servants; but it is to be remarked that both servants and lord were unarmed. He himself did not

even wear the customary sword, without which not a gentleman in France was seen at any distance from his own house, and no apparent arms of any kind, not even the small knife or dagger, often worn by a page, was visible amongst the attendants. There was a buzz of many voices as he approached, but it was instantly silenced, when, dismounting from his horse, he gave the rein to a servant, and then advanced to meet one or two persons who drew out from the crowd as if privileged by intimacy to speak with him. The first of these was Claude de l'Estang, whose hand he took and shook affectionately, though mournfully. The second was a tall thin ravenous-looking personage, with sharp-cut lengthened features, a keen, but somewhat unsettled, we might almost use the word phrenzied, eye, and an expression of countenance altogether neither very benevolent nor very prepossessing. He also took the Count's hand, saying, "I am glad to see thee, my son; I am glad to see thee. Thou art somewhat behind the time, and in this great day of back-sliding and falling off I feared that even thou, one of our chief props and greatest lights, might have departed from us into the camp of the Philistines."

"Fear not, Monsieur Chopel," replied the Count; "I trust there is no danger of such weakness on my part. I was detained to write a letter in answer to one from good Monsieur de Rouvré, who has suffered so much in our cause, and who, it seems, arrived at Ruffigny last night."

"I know he did," said Claude de l'Estang; "but pray, my dear Albert, before either myself or our good brother, Monsieur Chopel, attempt to lead the devotions of the people, do you speak a few words of comfort and consolation to them, and above all things counsel them to peace and tranquil doings."

The Count paused and seemed to hesitate for a moment. In truth, the task that was put upon him was not pleasant to him, and he would fain have avoided it; but accustomed to overcome all repugnance to that which was right, he conquered himself with scarcely a struggle, and advanced with Claude de l'Estang into the midst of the people, who made way with respectful reverence, as he sought for some slightly elevated point from which to address them more easily. Chopel and l'Estang, however, had chosen a sort of rude rock for their pulpit before he came, and having been led thither, the Count

mounted upon it, and took off his hat, as a sign that he was about to speak. All voices were immediately hushed, and he then went on.

“ My brethren,” he said, “ we are here assembled to worship God according to our own consciences, and to the rules and doctrines of the reformed church. In so doing we are not failing in our duty to the King, who, as sovereign of these realms, is the person whom, under God, we are most bound to obey and reverence. It has seemed fit to his Majesty, from motives, upon which I will not touch, to withdraw from us much that was granted by his predecessors. He has ordered the temples in which we are accustomed to worship to be closed, so that on this, the Sabbath day, we have no longer any place of permitted worship but in the open air. That, however, has not been denied us ; there is no prohibition to our meeting and praising God here, and this resource at least is allowed us, which, though it may put us to some slight inconvenience and discomfort, will not the less afford the sincere and devout an opportunity of raising their prayers to the Almighty, in company with brethren of the same faith and doctrines as themselves. We know that God does not dwell in temples made with hands ; and I

have only to remind you, my brethren, before giving place to our excellent ministers, who will lead our devotions this day, that the God we have assembled to worship is also a God of peace, who has told us, by the voice of his Son, not to revile those who revile us, nor smite those that smite us, but to bear patiently all things, promising that those who endure to the last shall be saved. I appointed this place," he continued, "for our meeting, because it was far from any town, and consequently we shall have few here from idle curiosity, and afford no occasion of offence to any man. I begged you earnestly to come unarmed also, as I myself have done, that there might be no doubt of our views and purposes being pacific. I am happy to see that all have followed this advice, I believe without exception, and also that there are several women amongst us, which, I trust, is a sign that, in the strait and emergency in which we now are, they will not abandon their husbands, their fathers, and their brothers, for any inducement, but continue to serve God in the faith in which they have been brought up."

Having thus spoken, the Count gave place and descended amongst the people, retiring several steps from the little sort of temporary

pulpit, and preparing to go through the service of the reformed church, as if he had been within the walls of the temple his father had built in Morseiul, and which was now ordered to be levelled with the ground.

After a few words between Claude de l'Estang and Chopel, the latter mounted the pulpit and gave out a psalm, the —, which he led himself, in a voice like thunder. The whole congregation joined; and though the verses that they repeated were in the simple unadorned words of the olden times, and the voices that sung them not always in perfect harmony, yet the sound of that melody in the midst of the desert had something strangely impressive, nay, even affecting. The hearts of a people that would not bow down before man, bowed down before God; and they who in persecution and despair had lost all trust on earth, in faith and hope raised their voices unto heaven with praise and adoration.

When the psalm was over, and the minds of all men prepared for prayer, the clergyman who had given out the psalm, closing his eyes and spreading his hands, turned his face towards the sky and began his address to the Almighty. We shall not pause upon the words that he

made use of here, as it would be irreverent to use them lightly ; but it is sufficient to say, that he mingled many themes with his address that both Claude de l'Estang and the Count de Morseil wished had been omitted. He thanked God for the trial and purification to which he had subjected his people : but in doing so, he dwelt so long upon, and entered so deeply into, the nature of all those trials and grievances and the source from which they sprang, pointed out with such virulent acrimony the tyranny and the persecution which the reformed church had suffered, and clothed so aptly, nay, so eloquently, his petitions against the persecutors and enemies of the church, in the sublime language of scripture, that the Count could not but feel that he was very likely to stir up the people to seek their deliverance with their own hand and think themselves fully justified by holy writ ; or, at all events, to exasperate their already excited passions, and render the least spark likely to cast them into a flame.

Albert of Morseil was uneasy while this was proceeding, especially as the prayer lasted an extraordinary length of time, and he could not refrain from turning to examine the countenances of some of the persons present, in

order to discover what was the effect produced upon them, especially as he saw a man, standing between him and the rock on which the preacher stood, grasp something under his cloak, as if the appearance of being unarmed was, in that case, not quite real. Near to him were one or two women wrapped up in the large grey cloaks of the country, and they obstructed his view to the right; but at some distance straight before him he saw the burly form of Virlay, the blacksmith, and close by him again the stern, but expressive, countenance of Armand Herval. Scattered round about, too, he remarked a considerable number of men with a single cock's feather stuck in the front of the hat, which, though bands of feathers and similar ornaments were very much affected, even by the lower classes of that period, was by no means a common decoration in the part of the country where he then was.

Every thing, indeed, was peaceable and orderly in the demeanour of the crowd: no one pressed upon the other, no one moved, no one spoke, but each and all stood in deep silence, listening to the words of the minister; but they listened with frowning brows and stern dark looks, and the young Count felt thankful that

the lateness of the hour, and the distance from any town, rendered it unlikely that the proceedings would be interrupted by the interference, or even appearance, of any of the Catholic authorities of the province.

The prayer of the clergyman Chopel at length came to an end ; and, as had been previously arranged between them, Claude de l'Estang, in turn, advanced. Another hymn was sung ; and the ejected minister of Auron commenced, what was then called amongst the Huguenots of France, “the preaching in the desert.” On mounting the rock that served them for a pulpit, the old man seemed a good deal affected ; and twice he wiped away tears from his eyes, while he gazed round upon the people with a look of strong interest and affection, which every one present saw and felt deeply. He then paused for a moment in silent prayer, and, when it was concluded, took a step forward with the Bible open in his hand, his demeanour changed, the spirit of the orator upon him, and high and noble energy lighting up his eyes and shining on his lofty brow.

“The nineteenth verse of the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke,” he said, “*In your patience possess ye your souls !*”

“ My brethren, let us be patient, for to such as are so, is promised the kingdom of heaven. My brethren, let us be patient, for so we are taught by the living word of God. My brethren, let us be patient, for Christ was patient, even unto death, before us. What ! shall we know that the saints and prophets of God have been scorned, and mocked, and persecuted, in all ages ? what ! shall we know that the apostles of Christ, the first teachers of the gospel of grace, have been scourged, and driven forth, and stoned and slain ? what ! shall we know that, for ages, the destroying sword was out, from land to land, against our brethren in the Lord ? what ! shall we know that he himself closed a life of poverty and endurance, by submitting willingly to insult, buffeting, and a torturing death?—and shall we not bear our cross meekly ? What ! I ask again, shall we know that the church of Christ was founded in persecution, built up by the death of saints, cemented by the blood of martyrs, and yet rose triumphant over the storms of heathen wrath ; and shall we doubt that yet, even yet, we shall stand and not be cast down ? Shall we refuse to seal the covenant with our blood, or to endure the reproach of our Lord even unto the last ?

“ Yes, my brethren, yes ! God will give you, and me also, grace to do so ; and though ‘ ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death,’ yet the faithful and the true shall endure unto the last, and ‘ *in your patience possess ye your souls.*’

“ But there is more required at your hands than patience, my brethren. There is constancy ! perseverance in the way of the Lord ! There must be no falling off in the time of difficulty or danger ; there must be no hesitation in the service of our God. We have put our hands to the plough, and we must not look back. We have engaged in the great work, and we must not slacken our diligence. Remember, my brethren, remember, that the most fiery persecution is but the trial of our faith, and all who strive for a great reward, all who struggle for the glory of the kingdom of heaven, must be as gold ten times purified in the fire. Were it not so even,—were we not Christians,—had we not the word of God for our direction,— had we not the command of Christ to obey, where is the man amongst us that would falsify the truth, declare that thing wrong which he believed to

be right, swear that he believed that which he knew to be false, put on the garb of hypocrisy and clothe himself with falsehood as with a garment, to shield himself from the scourge of the scorner or the sword of the persecutor?

“ If there be such a coward or such a hypocrite here, let him go forth from amongst us, and Satan, the father of lies, shall conduct him to the camp of the enemy. Where is the man amongst us, I say, that, were there nothing to restrain him but the inward voice of conscience, would show himself so base as to abandon the faith of his fathers, in the hour of persecution ?

“ But when we know that we are right, when the word of God is our warrant, when our faith in Christ is our stay, when the object before us is the glory of God and our own salvation, who would be fool enough to barter eternal condemnation for the tranquillity of a day? Who would not rather sell all that he has, and take up his cross and follow Christ, than linger by the flesh-pots of Egypt, and dwell in the tents of sin ?

“ Christ foretold, my brethren, that those who followed him faithfully should endure persecution to the end of the earth. He won us not by the

promises of earthly glory, he seduced us not by the allurements of worldly wealth, he held out no inducement to our ambition by the promises of power and authority, he bribed not our pride by the hope of man's respect and reverence. Oh, no; himself, *The Word of God*, which is but to say all in one word, *Truth*; he told us all things truly; he laid before us, as our lot below, poverty, contempt, and scorn, the world's reproach, the calumny of the evil, chains, tortures, and imprisonment, contumely, persecution, and death. These he set before us as our fate, these he suffered as our example, these he endured with patience for our atonement! Those who became followers of Christ knew well the burden that they took up; saw the load that they had here to bear; and, strengthened by faith and by the Holy Spirit, shrunk not from the task, groaned not under the weight of the cross. They saw before their eyes the exceeding great reward, — the reward that was promised to them, the reward that is promised to us, the reward that is promised to all who shall endure unto the last, — to enter into the joy of our Master, to become a partaker of the kingdom reserved for him from before all worlds.

“ We must therefore, my brethren, endure;

we must endure unto the last; but we must endure with patience, and with forbearance, and with meekness, and with gentleness; and ‘it shall turn to us for a testimony,’ it shall produce for us a reward. They may smite us here, and they may slay us, and they may bring us down to the dust of death; but he has promised that not a hair of our heads shall perish, and that *in our patience shall we possess our souls.*

“ The woe that he denounced against Jerusalem, did it not fall upon it? When the day of vengeance came, that all things written were to be fulfilled, did not armies compass it about, and desolation draw nigh unto it, and was not distress great in the land and wrath upon the people, and did not millions fall by the sword, and were not millions led away captives into all nations, and was not Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles, and was there one stone left upon another?

“ If, then, God, the God of mercy, so fulfilled each word, when kindled to exercise wrath; how much more shall he fulfil every tittle of his gracious promises to those that serve him? If, then, the prophecies of destruction have been fulfilled, so, also, shall be the prophecies of grace and glory,

Joy Him whose words pass not away, though neaven and earth may pass away. For sorrows and endurance in time, he has promised us glory and peace in eternity; and for the persecutions which we now suffer, he gives to those, who endure unto the last, the recompence of his eternal joy.

“ With endurance we shall live, and *with patience we shall possess our souls*; and we — if we so do, serving God in this life under all adversities — shall have peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding; joy, the joy of the Lord, who has trodden down his enemies; glory, the glory of the knowledge of God, when he cometh with clouds and great glory, and every eye shall see him, and they, also, which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

The words of the preacher were poured forth rather than spoken. It seemed less like eloquence than like inspiration. His full, round, clear voice was heard through every part of his large auditory; not a word was lost, not a tone was indistinct, and the people listened with that deep stern silence which causes a general rustle, like the sighing of the wind, to take

place through the multitude when he paused for a moment in his discourse, and every one drew deep the long-suppressed breath.

In the same strain, and with the same powers of voice and gesture, Claude de l'Estang was going on with his sermon, when some sounds were heard at the farther part of the crowd, towards the spot where the scene was sheltered by the stunted wood we have mentioned. As those sounds were scarcely sufficient to give any interruption to the minister, being merely those apparently of some other persons arriving, the Count de Morseiul, and almost every one on that side of the preacher, remained gazing upon him as he went on with the same energy, and did not turn their heads to see what occasioned the noise.

Those, however, who were on the opposite side, and who, when looking towards the minister, had at the same time in view the spot from which the sounds proceeded, were seen to gaze sternly from time to time in that direction ; and once or twice, notwithstanding the solemn words they heard, stooped down their heads together, and spoke in whispering consultation. These appearances at length induced the Count de Morseiul to turn his eyes that way ; when he

beheld a sight, which at once made his blood boil, but made him thankful also that he had come in such guise as even to act as a restraint upon himself, having no arms of any kind upon him.

At the skirt of the crowd were collected a party of eighteen or twenty dragoons, who were forcing their horses slowly in amongst the people, who drew back, and gazed upon them with looks of stern determined hatred. The purpose of the soldiers, indeed, seemed to be simply to insult and to annoy, for they did not proceed to any overt act of violence, and were so far separated from each other, in a disorderly manner, that it could only be supposed they came thither to find themselves sport, rather than to disperse the congregation by any lawful authority. The foremost of the whole party was the young Marquis de Hericourt, and Albert of Morseil conceived, perhaps not unreasonably, that there might be some intention of giving him personal annoyance at the bottom of that young officer's conduct.

Distinguished from the rest of the people by his dress, the Count was very plainly to be seen from the spot where De Hericourt was, and the young dragoon slowly made his way

towards him through the press, looking at the people on either side with but ill-concealed signs of contempt upon his countenance.

The Count determined, as far as possible, to set an example of patience; and when the rash youth came close up to him, saying aloud, “ Ha, Monsieur de Morseul, a lucky opportunity ! I have long wished to hear a *préche*,” the Count merely raised his hand as a sign for the young man to keep silence, and pointed with his right hand to the pastor, who with an undisturbed demeanour and steady voice pursued his sermon as if not the slightest interruption had occurred, although the young dragoon on horseback in the midst of his people, was at that moment before him.

De Hericourt was bent upon mischief, however. Rash to the pitch of folly, he had neither inquired nor considered whether the people were armed or not, but having heard that one of the preachings in the desert was to take place, he had come, unauthorised, for the purpose of disturbing and dispersing the congregation, not by the force of law, but by insult and annoyance, which he thought the Protestants would not dare to resist. He listened, then, for a moment or two to the words of Claude de l'Estang,

seeming, for an instant, somewhat struck with the impressive manner of the old man ; but he soon got tired, and, turning the bridle of his horse, as if to pass round the Count de Morseiul, he said again, aloud, “ You’ve got a number of women here, Monsieur de Morseiul ; pretty little heretics, I’ve no doubt ! I should like to have a look at their faces.”

So saying, he spurred on unceremoniously, driving back five or six people before him, and caught hold of one of the women — whom we have noticed as standing not very far from the Count de Morseiul — trying, at the same time, to pull back the thick veil which was over her face.

The Count could endure no longer, more especially as, in the grey cloak and the veil with which the person assailed by the dragoon was covered, he thought he recognised the dress of the lady he had formerly seen at the house of Claude de l’Estang.

Starting forward then instantly to her side, he seized the bridle of De Hericourt’s horse, and forced the animal back almost upon his haunches. The young officer stooped forward over his saddle bow, seeking for a pistol in his holster, and at the same moment addressing

an insulting and contemptuous term to the Count. No sooner was it uttered, however, than he received one single buffet from the hand of Albert of Morseiul, which cast him headlong from his horse into the midst of the people.

Every one was rushing upon him; his dragoons were striving to force their way forward to the spot; the voice of Claude de l'Estang, though exerted to its utmost power, was unheard; and in another instant the rash young man would have been literally torn to pieces by the people he had insulted.

But with stern and cool self-possession the Count de Morseiul strode over him, and held back those that were rushing forward, with his powerful arms, exclaiming, in a voice of thunder,—

“Stand back, my friends, stand back! This is a private quarrel. I must have no odds against an adversary and a fellow-soldier. Stand back, I say! We are here man to man, and whoever dares to take him out of my hands is my enemy, not my friend. Rise, Monsieur de Hericourt,” he said in a lower voice, “rise, mount your horse, and be gone. I cannot protect you a minute longer.”

Some of the Count's servants, who had been standing near, had by this time made their way up to him, and with their help he cleared the space around, shouting to the dragoons who were striving to come up, and had not clearly seen the transaction which had taken place, "Keep back, keep back!—I will answer for his life! If you come up there will be blood-shed!"

In the mean time the young man had sprung upon his feet, his dress soiled by the fall, his face glowing like fire, and fury flashing from his eyes.

"You have struck me," he cried, glaring upon the Count; "you have struck me, and I will have your blood."

"Hush, Sir," said the Count, calmly. "Do not show yourself quite a madman. Mount your horse, and begone while you may! I shall be at the château of Morseul till twelve o'clock tomorrow," he added in a lower voice. "Mount, mount!" he proceeded in a quicker manner, seeing some movements on the other side of the crowd of a very menacing kind; "Mount, if you would live and keep your soldiers' lives another minute!"

De Hericourt sprang into the saddle, and,

while the Count, in that tone of command which was seldom disobeyed, exclaimed, “ Make way for him there ; let no one impede him ; ” he spurred on quickly through the crowd, gathering his men together as he went.

All eyes were turned to look after him, but the moment he and his troop were free from the people at the extreme edge of the crowd, he was seen to speak a word to the man at the head of the file. The soldiers immediately halted, faced round, and, carrying fire-arms as they did, coolly unslung their carbines.

The first impulse of that part of the crowd nearest to the dragoons, was to press back, while those on the opposite side strove to get forward, headed by Virlay and Armand Herval. The crush in the centre was consequently tremendous, but the Count de Morseul succeeded in casting himself between the female he had saved and the troopers. At the very moment that he did so, the dragoons raised their fusees to their shoulders, and fired at once into the midst of the compact mass of people. Every shot told ; and one unfortunate young man, about two paces from the Count de Morseul, received no less than four shots in his head and throat. A mingled yell of rage and agony rose up from

the people, while a loud exulting laugh broke from the soldiery. But their triumph was only for a moment, for they were instantly assailed by a shower of immense stones which knocked one of the troopers off his horse, and killed him on the spot.

Herval and Virlay, too, made their way round behind the rock on which the clergyman had been standing, and it now became apparent that, in that part of the crowd at least, arms were not wanting, for flash after flash broke from the dense mass of the advancing multitude, and swords and pikes were seen gleaming in the air.

The troopers at length turned their horses and fled, but not before they had suffered tremendously. The Huguenots pursued, and with peculiar skill and knowledge of the country, drove them hither and thither over the moor. Some having mounted the horses which brought them thither, pursued them into spots that they could not pass, while some on foot defended the passes and ravines. The Count de Morseiul and his servants mounted instantly, and rode far and wide over the place, attempting to stop the effusion of blood, and being, in many instances, successful in rescuing some of

the soldiery from the hands of the people and from the death they well deserved. Thus passed more than an hour, till seeing that the light was beginning to fail, and that the last spot of the sun was just above the horizon, the Count turned back to the scene of that day's unfortunate meeting, in the hope of rendering some aid and assistance to the wounded who had been left behind.

He had by this time but one servant with him, and when he came to the spot where the meeting had been held, he found it quite deserted. The wounded and the dead had been carried away by those who remained ; and, of the rest of the people who had been there, the greater part had been scattered abroad in pursuit of the fugitive soldiers, while part had fled in fear to their own homes. There was nothing but the cold grey rock, and the brown moor stained here and there with blood, and the dark purple streaks of the evening sky, and the east wind whistling mournfully through the thin trees.

“ I think, Sir,” said the servant, after his master had paused for some moments in melancholy mood, gazing on the scene around, “ I think, Sir, that I hear voices down by the water, where we put up the stork as we came.”

The Count listened, and heard voices too, and he instantly turned his horse thither. By the side of that dark water he found a melancholy group, consisting of none other but Claude de l'Estang and two female figures, all kneeling round or supporting the form of a third person, also a female, who seemed severely hurt. This was the sight which presented itself to the eyes of the Count from the top of the bank above; and, dismounting, he sprang down to render what assistance he could.

His first attention was turned, of course, almost entirely to the wounded girl, whose head and shoulders were supported on the knee of one of the other women, while the pastor was pouring into her ear, in solemn tones, the words of hope and consolation — but they were words of hope and consolation referring to another world. The hand that lay upon her knee was fair and soft, the form seemed young and graceful; and, though the Count as he descended could not see her face, the novice's veil that hung from her head told him a sad tale in regard to the story of her life. He doubted not, from all he saw, that she was dying; and his heart sickened when he thought of the unhappy man who had brought her thither, and of what would be the feelings

of his fierce and vehement heart when he heard the fate that had befallen her.

He had scarcely time to think of it, for, ere he had well reached the bottom of the descent, the sound of a horse coming furiously along was heard, and Armand Herval paused on the opposite side of the dell, and gazed down upon the group below. It seemed as if instinct told him that there was what he sought; for, without going on to the moor, he turned his horse's rein down the descent, though it was steep and dangerous, and in a moment had sprung from the beast's back and was kneeling by her he had loved.

It is scarcely to be told whether she was conscious of his presence or not, for the hand of death was strong upon her; but it is certain that, as he printed upon her hands the burning kisses of love in agony, and quenched them with his tears, it is certain that a smile came over her countenance before that last awful shudder with which the soul parted from the body for ever.

After it was all over he gazed at her for a single instant without speaking. Every one present saw that he acted as if of right, and let him do what he would; and unpinning the

veil from her long beautiful hair, he took and steeped it in the blood that was still, notwithstanding all that had been done to stanch it, welling from a deep wound in her breast, till every part of the fabric was wet with gore. He then took the veil, placed it in his brown, scarred bosom — upon his heart ; — and raising his eyes and one hand to Heaven, murmured some words that were not distinctly heard. He had not uttered one audible sentence since he came up, but he now turned, and with a tone of intreaty addressed Claude de l'Estang.

“ The spirit will bless you, Sir,” he said, “ for giving her comfort in the hour of death ! May I bear her to your house till eleven o'clock to-night, when I may remove her to her own abode ? ”

“ I must not refuse you, my poor young man,” replied the clergyman. “ But I fear that my house will be no safe resting-place, even for the dead, just now.”

Herval grasped his arm, and said, in a low but emphatic tone, “ It is safe, Sir, against all the troops in Poitou. How long it may be so, I cannot tell; but as long as this arm can wield a sword, it shall not want defence. My Lord Count,” he added, pointing to the dead

body, “ did I not hear that you meet her murderer to-morrow at noon ?”

“ I know not the hour or place he may appoint,” replied the Count in a low deep voice; “ but we do meet ! and there are things that call aloud for vengeance, Herval, which even I cannot forgive.”

The man laughed aloud, but that laugh was no voice of merriment. It was dreary, boding, horrible, and in good accordance with the circumstances and the scene. He replied nothing to the words of the Count, however, turning to the pastor and saying, “ Now, Sir, now ! If you will give shelter to the dead for but an hour or two, you shall win deep gratitude of the living.”

“ Willingly,” replied the pastor: “ But then,” he added, turning to one of the other two women who were present, “ Who shall protect you home, dear lady ?”

“ That will I do, at the risk of my life,” said the Count; and the other woman, whom the pastor had not addressed, replied, “ It will be better so. We have been too long absent already.”

Armand Herval had not noticed the brief words that were spoken, for he was gazing with an intense and eager look upon the fair counte-

nance of the dead, with bitter anguish written in every line of his face. The pastor touched his arm gently, saying, "Now, my son, let me and you carry the body. We can pass through the wood unseen."

But the other put him by, with his hand, saying, in a sad tone, "I need no help;" and then kneeled down by her side, he put his arms around her, saying, "Let me bear thee in my bosom, sweet child, once only, once before the grave parteth us, and ere it shall unite us again. Oh, Claire, Claire," he added, kissing her cold lips passionately, "Oh, Claire, Claire, was it for this I taught thee a purer faith, and brought thee hither to see the worship of the persecuted followers of the cross? Was it for this I bent down my nature, and became soft as a woman to suit my heart to yours? Oh, Claire, Claire, if I have brought thee to death, I will avenge thy death; and for every drop that falls from my eyes, I will have a drop of blood."

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!" the old man said in a low tone; "but let us haste, my son, for night is coming on fast. Farewell, lady. Albert, I trust them to thee. We shall meet again—if not here, in heaven!"

Armand Herval took the corpse of the fair

girl who had fallen, in his powerful arms, and bore her after the pastor towards the wood we have mentioned, while his horse, trained so to do, followed him with a regular pace, and entered the road through the copse immediately after him.

Albert of Morseuil remained alone with the two ladies, his interposition in favour of one of whom had brought on the sad events which we have detailed. As soon as the pastor was gone, he advanced towards her, and held out both his hands with deep emotion. “I cannot be mistaken,” he said. “The disguise might deceive any other eyes, but it cannot mine. Clémence! it must be Clémence! Am I not right?”

She put her hands in his in return, saying, “Oh, yes, you are right! But what, what shall I do, Monsieur de Morseuil? I am faint and weary with agitation, and all this terrible scene. I have left the carriage that brought me hither at two or three miles’ distance, and, perhaps, it too has gone away on the report of the fliers from this awful place.”

“I will send up my servant immediately,” said the Count, “to see, and in the mean time rest here, Clémence. In this deep hollow we shall escape all passing eyes till his return, and you will have more shelter than any where

else. — Where can the servant find the carriage?"

Clémence, who had raised her veil, looked towards her companion to explain more fully than she could do. But her attendant, Maria—for such was the person who accompanied her—judging, perhaps, that a word spoken at such a moment between two people, situated as were Clémence de Marly and the Count de Morseiul, might have more effect than whole hours of conversation at another time, took upon herself the task of telling the servant, saying, "I can direct him, my Lord, better than any one. It were as well to bring your horse down here before he goes."

The Count assented, and with a slow step she proceeded to fulfil her errand.

"Clémence de Marly trembled not a little. She felt that the moment for the decision of her fate for life was come. She felt that her heart and her faith must be plighted to Albert of Morseiul at that moment, or, perhaps, never. She felt that if she did so plight it, she plighted herself to care, to grief, to anxiety, to danger,—perhaps to destruction,—perhaps to desolation. But that very feeling took away all hesitation, all scruple, and made her, in a moment, make

up her mind to let him see her heart as it really was, to cast away from her every vain and every proud feeling, and to stand, before him she loved, without disguise. The Count, too, felt, and felt strongly, that this was a moment which must not be let pass ; and the instant the attendant had quitted them, he raised the lady's hand to his lips, pressing on it a warm and passionate kiss.

“ Tell me, Clémence, tell me, dear Clémence,” he said, “ what is the meaning of this. What is the meaning of your presence here ? Is it, is it that the only barrier which existed between us is removed ? Is it that you are of the same faith as I am ? ”

“ Is that the only barrier, Albert ? ” she said, shaking her head somewhat reproachfully. “ Is that the only barrier ? You spoke of many.”

“ I spoke of only one insurmountable,” replied the Count, “ and I believed that to be insurmountable, Clémence, for I was even then aware of the decree, which did not appear till afterwards, but which forbade the marriage of Catholics and Protestants.”

“ And was that the only insurmountable one ? ” she demanded. “ Was that the only

insurmountable barrier to our union?—What, if I had previously loved another?"

"And is it so, then?" demanded the Count, with somewhat of sadness in his tone. "And have you before loved another?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Clémence eagerly, and placing the hand which she had withdrawn in his again; "No, no! The woman was coming over me once more, but I will conquer the woman. No, I never did love another. Even if I had fancied it, I should now know, Albert, by what I feel at this moment, how idle such a fancy had been. But I never did fancy it. I never did believe it, even in the least degree; and now that I have said all that I can say, whatever may happen, never doubt me, Albert. Whatever you see, never entertain a suspicion. I have never loved another, and I can say nothing more."

"Yes, yes! Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, "you can say more, Clémence. Say that you love me."

She bent down her head, and Albert of Morseul drew her gently to his bosom. "Say it! Say it, dear Clémence!" he said.

Clémence hesitated, but at length she murmured something that no other ear but his

could have heard, had it been ever so close. But he heard, and heard aright, that her reply was, “But too well!”

The Count sealed the words upon her lips with his, and Clémence de Marly hid her eyes upon his shoulder, for they were full of tears. “And now,” she added, raising them after a moment with one of her own sparkling smiles, “and now, having said those awful words, of course I am henceforth a slave. But this is no scene for jest, Albert. Desolation and destruction is round us on every side, I fear.”

“It matters not,” replied the Count, “if thy faith is the same as mine is —”

“It is, it is!” cried Clémence. “It may have wavered, Albert; but, thanks to yon good creature who has just left us, the light has never been wholly extinguished in my mind. My mother was a Protestant, and in that faith she brought me up. She then, knowing that I must fall into other hands, left Maria with me, with charges to me never to let her quit me. I was but a child then,” she continued, “and they forced me to abjure. But their triumph lasted not an hour, for though I dared not show my feelings, I always felt that the path on which they would lead me was wrong, and strove,

whenever I could, to return to a better way. To-day I came here at all risks, but I fear very much, Albert, I fear that destruction, and oppression, and grief, surround us on every side."

"If thy faith be the same as mine, Clémence," said the Count, "if thy heart be united with mine, I will fear nothing, I will dare all. If they will not suffer us to live in peace in this our native land, fortunately I have just transmitted to another country enough to support us in peace, and tranquillity, and ease.— And yet, oh yet, Clémence," he continued, his tone becoming sadder and his countenance losing its look of hope, "and yet, oh yet, Clémence, when I think of that unhappy man who has just left us, and of the fair girl whose corpse he has now borne away in his arms;—when I remember that scarcely more than eight days have passed since he was animated with the same hopes that I am, founding those hopes upon the same schemes of flight, and trusting more than I have ever trusted to the bright hereafter,—when I think of that, and of his present fate, the agony that must now be wringing his heart, the dark obscurity of his bitter despair, I tremble to dream of the future, not for myself,

but for thee, sweet girl. But we must fall upon some plan both of communicating when we will, and of acting constantly on one scheme and for one object. Here comes your faithful attendant. She must know our situation and our plans — only one word more. You have promised me this," he continued, once more raising her hand to his lips.

"When and where you will," replied Clémence.

"And you will fly with me, whenever I find the opportunity of doing so?"

"I will," she answered.

The attendant had now approached, and the Count took a step towards her, still holding Clémence by the hand, as if he feared to lose the precious boon she had bestowed upon him.

"She is mine, Madame," he said, addressing the attendant. "She is mine, by every promise that can bind one human being to another."

"And you are hers?" demanded the attendant solemnly. "And you are hers, my Lord Count, by the same promises?"

"I am, by every thing I hold sacred," said the Count, raising his hand towards Heaven, "now and for ever, till death take me from her.

But ere we can be united, I fear, I fear that many things must be undergone. Alas, that I should recommend it! but she must even conceal her faith: for, from the cruel measures of the court, even now death or perpetual imprisonment in some unknown dungeon is the only fate reserved for the relapsed convert, as they call those who have been driven to embrace a false religion, and quitted it in renewed disgust. But I must trust to you to afford me the means of communicating with her at all times. The only chance for us, I fear, is flight."

"It is the only one! it is the only one!" replied the maid. "Fly with her to England, my Lord. Fly with her as speedily as possible. Be warned, my Lord, and neither delay nor hesitate. The edge of the net is just falling on you. If you take your resolution at once, and quit the land before a week be over, you may be safe; but if you stay longer, every port in France will be closed against you."

"I will make no delay," replied the Count. "Her happiness and her safety are now committed to my charge; inestimable trusts, which I must on no account risk. But I have some followers and dependants to provide for, even here. I have some friends to defend; and I

must not show myself remiss in that ; or she herself would hardly love me. It were easy, methinks, however, for you and your mistress to make your escape at once to England, and for me to join you there hereafter."

" Oh no, my lord, I fear not !" replied the maid. " I do not think Monsieur de Rouvré himself would object to her marrying you and flying. He shrewdly suspects, I think, that she is Protestant at heart ; but he would never yield to her flying herself. But, hark ! I hear horses coming. Let us draw back and be quiet."

" There is no sound of carriage-wheels, I fear," said Clémence, listening. " Oh, Albert, all this day's sad events have quite overpowered me ; and I dread the slightest sound."

The Count pressed her hand in his, and, as was usual with him in moments of danger, turned his eyes towards his sword-belt, forgetting that the blade was gone. The sound of horses' feet approaching rapidly, however, still continued ; and, at length, a party of four persons, whose faces could not be well distinguished in the increasing darkness, stopped exactly opposite the spot where a little rough road led down into the hollow where the lovers were. One of the riders sprang to the ground in a moment, and, leav-

ing his horse with the others, advanced, exclaiming aloud,—

“ Hollo ! Ho ! Albert de Morseul ! Hollo ! where are you ? ”

“ It is the voice of the Chevalier d’Evran,” cried Clémence, clinging closer to her lover, as if with some degree of fear.

“ I think it is,” said the Count; “ but fear not ! He is friendly to us all. Draw down your veil, however, my beloved ; it is not necessary that he should see and know you.”

With the same shout the Chevalier continued to advance towards them, and the Count took a step or two forward to meet him. But, shaking his friend warmly by the hand, the Chevalier passed on at once to the lady, and, to the surprise of the Count, addressed her immediately by her name : “ Very pretty, indeed, Mademoiselle Clémence ! ” he said ; “ this is as dangerous a jest, I think, as ever was practised.”

Clémence hesitated not a moment, but replied at once, “ It is no jest, Sir ! It is a dangerous reality, if you will.”

“ Poo, poo, silly girl,” cried the Chevalier. “ By the Lord that lives, you will get yourself into the castle of Pignerol, or the Bastile, or some such pleasant abode ! I have come at full speed to bring you back.”

“ Stay yet a minute, Louis,” said the Count somewhat gravely. “ There is another person to be consulted in this business, whom you do not seem to recollect. Mademoiselle de Marly is, for the time, under my protection; and you know we delegate such a duty to no one.”

“ My dear Count,” replied the Chevalier, “ the good Duc de Rouvré will doubtless be infinitely obliged to you for the protection you have given to this fair lady; but having sent me to find her and bring her back, I must do so at once; and will only beg her to be wise enough to make no rash confessions as she goes. The affair, as far as she is concerned, is a jest at present: it is likely, I hear, to prove a serious jest to others. I left your man, who directed me hither, to bring up the carriage as far as possible: and now, Mademoiselle Clémence, we will go, with your good pleasure.”

The tone of authority in which the Chevalier spoke by no means pleased Albert of Morseul, who felt strong in his heart the newly acquired right of mutual love to protect Clémence de Marly himself. He was not of a character, however, to quarrel with his friend lightly, and he replied, “ Louis, we are too old friends for you to make me angry. As your proposal of

conveying Mademoiselle de Marly back in her own carriage, coincides with what we had previously arranged, of course I shall not oppose it; but equally, of course, I accompany her to Ruffigny."

"I am afraid that cannot be, Albert," answered the Chevalier; and the resolute words, "It must be!" had just been uttered in reply, when Clémence interfered.

"It is very amusing, gentlemen," she said in her ordinary tone of scornful playfulness, "it is very amusing, indeed, to hear you calmly and quietly settling a matter that does not in the least depend upon yourselves. You forget that I am here, and that the decision must be mine. Monsieur le Chevalier, be so good as not to look authoritative, for, depend upon it, you have no more power here than that old hawthorn stump. Monsieur de Rouvré cannot delegate what he does not possess; and as I have never yet suffered any one to rule me, I shall not commence that bad practice to-night. You may now tell me, in secret, what are your motives in this business; but, depend upon it, that my own high judgment will decide in the end."

"Let it!" replied the Chevalier; and bend-

ing down his head, he whispered a few words to Clémence in a quick and eager manner. She listened attentively, and when he had done, turned at once to the Count de Morseiul, struggling to keep up the same light manner, but in vain.

"I fear," she said, "Monsieur de Morseiul, that I must decide for the plan of the Chevalier, and that I must lay my potent commands upon you not to accompany or follow me. Nay more, I will forbid your coming to Ruffigny to-morrow; but the day after, unless you hear from me to the contrary, you may be permitted to inquire after my health."

Albert of Morseiul was deeply mortified; too much so, indeed, to reply in any other manner than by a stately bow. Clémence saw that he was hurt; and, though some unexplained motive prevented her from changing her resolution, she cast off reserve at once, and holding out her hand to him, said aloud, notwithstanding the presence of the Chevalier, "Do you forgive me, Albert?"

Though unable to account for her conduct, the Count felt that he loved her deeply still, and he pressed his lips upon her hand warmly and eagerly, while Clémence added in a lower

tone, but by no means one inaudible to those around who chose to listen, “ Have confidence in me, Albert ! Have confidence in me, and remember you have promised never to doubt me whatever may happen. Oh, Albert, having once given my affection, believe me utterly incapable of trifling with yours even by a single thought.”

“ I will try, Clémence,” he replied ; “ but you must own there is something here to be explained.”

“ There is !” she said, “ there is ; and it shall be explained as soon as possible ; but, in the mean time, trust me ! Here comes the servant, I think : the carriage must be near.”

It was as she supposed ; and the Count gave her his arm to assist her in climbing back to the level ground above, saying, at the same time in a tone of some coldness which he could not conquer, “ As the lady has herself decided, Chevalier, I shall not of course press my attendance farther than to the carriage door ; but have you men enough with you to insure her safety ? It is now completely dark.”

“ Quite enough !” replied the Chevalier, “ quite enough, Albert ;” and he fell into silence till they reached the side of the vehicle, drop-

ping, however, a few yards behind Clémence and her lover.

Every moment of existence is certainly precious, as a part of the irrevocable sum of time written against us in the book of life; but there is no occasion on which the full value of each instant is so entirely felt, in which every minute is so dear, so treasured, so inestimable in our eyes, as when we are about to part with her we love. Albert of Morseuil felt that it was so; and in the few short moments that passed ere they reached the carriage, words were spoken in a low murmuring tone, which, in the intensity of the feelings they expressed and excited, wrought more deeply on his heart and hers, than could the passage of long indifferent years. They were of those few words spoken in life that remain in the ear of memory for ever.

The fiery hand that, at the impious feast, wrote the fate of the Assyrian in characters of flame, left them to go out extinguished when the announcement was complete; but the words that the hand of deep and intense passion writes upon firm, high, and energetic hearts, remain for ever, even unto the grave itself.

Those moments were brief, however, and Clémence and her attendant were soon upon

their way ; the Chevalier sprang upon his horse, and then held out his hand frankly to the Count. “ Albert,” he said, laughing, “ I have never yet beheld so great a change of Love’s making as that which the truant boy has wrought in thee. Thou wouldest even quarrel with thy oldest and dearest companion — thou who art no way quarrelsome. You have known me now long, Albert ; love me well still. If you have ever seen me do a dishonest act, cast me off; if not, as I heard Clémence say just now — trust me !” and thus saying, he galloped off, without waiting for any reply.

CHAPTER V.

THE REVENGE.

WHILE Clémence de Marly cast herself back in the carriage; and, with the great excitement under which she had been acting for some time, now over, hid her eyes with her hands, and gave herself up to deep, and even to painful thought — while over that bright and beautiful countenance came a thousand varied expressions as she recollect ed all that had passed — while the look of horror rose there as she remembered all the fearful scenes she had beheld, the murderous treachery of the dragoons, the retribution taken by the people, and the death of the unhappy girl who had received one of the random shots — while that again was succeeded by the expression of admiration and enthusiasm, as she recalled the words and conduct of the Protestant pastor, and while a blush, half of shame and half of joy, succeeded, as she remembered all that had passed between her and Albert of Morseil; the Count himself was wending his

way slowly homeward, with feelings different from hers, and by no means so happy.

She knew that difficulty and danger surrounded her, she knew that much was necessarily to be endured, much to be apprehended; but she had woman's greatest, strongest consolation. She had the great, the mighty support, that she was loved by him whom alone she loved. With her that was enough to carry her triumphant through all danger, to give her a spirit to resist all oppression, to support her under all trials, to overcome all fears.

It may be asked, when we say that Albert of Morseiul's feelings were different, whether he then loved her less than she loved him, whether love in his bosom was less powerful, less all-sufficing than in hers. It would seem strange to answer, no; yet such was not the case. He loved her as much, as deeply, as she did him; he loved her as tenderly, as truly. His love—though there must always be a difference between the love of man and the love of woman—was as full, as perfect, as all-sufficing as her own, and yet his bosom was not so much at ease as hers, his heart did not feel the same confidence in its own happiness that hers did. But there were many different causes combined to

produce that effect. In the first place, he knew the dangers, the obstacles, the difficulties, far better than she did. He knew them more intimately, more fully, more completely; they were all present to his mind at once; no bright hopes of changing circumstances came to relieve the prospect; but all, except the love of Clémence de Marly, was dark, obscure, and threatening around him. That love might have seemed, however, but as a brighter spot amidst the obscurity, had it not been that apprehensions for her were now added to all his apprehensions for his religion and his country. It might have seemed all the brighter for the obscurity, had it been itself quite unclouded, had there not been some shadows, though slight, some mystery to be struggled with, something to be forgotten or argued down.

During the few last minutes that he was with her, the magic fascination of her presence had conquered every thing, and seated love triumphant above all; but as he rode on, Albert de Morseul pondered over what had occurred, thought of the influence which the Chevalier d'Evran had exerted over her, combined it with what he had seen before at Poitiers, and pronounced it in his own heart, "very strange." He

resolved not to think upon it, and yet he thought. He accused himself—the man of all others the least suspicious on the earth, by nature—he accused himself of being basely suspicious. He argued with himself that it was impossible that either on the part of Clémence or the Chevalier there should be any thing which could give him pain, when each, in the presence of the other, behaved to him as they had behaved that night; and yet there was something to be explained, which hung—like one of those thin veils of cloud that sometimes cover even the summer sun, prognosticating a weeping evening to a blithe noon—which hung over the only star that fate had left to shine upon his track, and he thought of it sadly and anxiously, and longed for something to bear it far away.

He struggled with such feelings and such reflections for some time; and then, forcing his thoughts to other things, he found that there was plenty, indeed, for him to consider and to provide against, plenty to inquire into and to ponder over, ere he resolved or acted. First came the recollection of the quarrel between himself and the young De Hericourt. He knew that the rash and cruel young man had made his escape from the field, for he himself, with two

of his servants, had followed him close, and, by detaining a party of the pursuers, had afforded the commander of the dragoons an opportunity to fly. That he would immediately require that which is absurdly called satisfaction, for the blow which had been struck, there could be no earthly doubt, although the laws against duelling were at that time enforced with the utmost strictness, and there was not the slightest chance whatsoever of the King showing mercy to any Protestant engaged in a duel with a Roman Catholic.

No man more contemned or reprobated the idiotical custom of duelling than the Count himself; no man looked upon it in a truer light than he did; but yet must we not forgive him, if, even with such feelings and with such opinions, he prepared, without a thought or hesitation, to give his adversary the meeting he demanded? Can we severely blame him if he determined, with his own single arm, to avenge the wanton slaughter that had been committed, and to put the barrier of a just punishment between the murderer of so many innocent people and a repetition of the crime? Can we blame him, if, seeing no chance whatsoever of the law doing justice upon the offender, he

resolved — risking at the same time his own life — to take the law into his hand, and seek justice for himself and others?

The next subject that started up for consideration was the general events of that day, and the question of what colouring would be given to those events at the court of France.

A peaceful body of people, meeting together for the worship of the Almighty, in defiance of no law, (for the edict concerning the expulsion of the Protestant pastors, and prohibiting the preaching of the reformed religion at all, had not yet appeared,) had been brutally insulted by a body of unauthorised armed men, had been fired upon by them without provocation, and had lost several of their number, murdered in cold blood and in a most cowardly manner, by the hands of the military. They had then, in their own defence, attacked and pursued their brutal assailants, and had slain several of them as a direct consequence of their own crimes.

Such were the simple facts of the case; but what was the tale, the Count asked himself, which would be told at the court of France, and vouched for by the words of those, who, having committed the great crime of unprovoked murder, would certainly entertain no

scruple in regard to justifying it by the lesser crime of a false oath?

“ It will be represented,” thought the Count, “ that a body of armed fanatics met for some illegal purpose, and intending no less than revolt against the King’s government, attacked and slaughtered a small body of the royal troops sent to watch their movements. It will be represented that the dragoons fought gallantly against the rebels, and slew a great number of their body; and this, doubtless, will be vouched for by the words of respectable people, all delicately adjusted by Romish fraud; and while the sword and the axe are wetted with the blood of the innocent and the unoffending, the murderer, and his accomplices, may be loaded with honours and rewards! — But it shall not be so if I can stay it,” he added. “ I will take the bold, perhaps the rash, resolution, — I will cast myself in the gap. I will make the truth known, and the voice thereof shall be heard throughout Europe, even if I fall myself. I, at least, was there unarmed: that can be proved. No weapon has touched my hand during this day, and therefore my testimony may be less suspected.”

While he thus pondered, riding slowly on through the thick darkness which had now

fallen completely around his path, he passed a little wood, which is called the wood of Jersel to this day; but, just as he had arrived at the opposite end, two men started out upon him as if to seize the bridle of his horse. Instantly, however, another voice exclaimed from behind, “Back, back! I told you any one coming the other way. He cannot come that way, fools. We have driven him into the net, and he has but one path to follow. Let the man go on, whoever he is, and disturb him not.” The men were, by this time, drawing back, and they instantly disappeared behind the trees; while the Count rode on with his servant at somewhat a quicker pace.

On his arrival at his own dwelling, Albert of Morseul proceeded, at once, to the library of the château, and though Jerome Riquet strongly pressed him to take some refreshment, he applied himself at once to draw up a distinct statement of all that had occurred, nor quitted it till the night had two thirds waned. He then retired to rest, ordering himself to be called, without fail, if any body came to the château, demanding to see him. For the first hour, however, after he had lain down, as may well be supposed, he could not close his eyes. The

obscurity seemed to encourage thought, and to call up all the fearful memories of the day. It was a fit canvass, the darkness of the night, for imagination to paint such awful pictures on. There is something soothing, however, in the grey twilight of the morning, which came at length, and then, but not till then, the Count slept. Though his slumber was disturbed and restless, it was unbroken for several hours; and it was nearly eleven o'clock in the day when, starting up suddenly from some troublous dream, he awoke and gazed wildly round the room, not knowing well where he was. The sight of the sun streaming into the apartment, however, showed him how long he had slept, and ringing the bell that lay by his bedside, he demanded eagerly of Jerome Riquet, who appeared in an instant, whether no one had been to seek him.

The man replied, "No one," and informed his lord that the gates of the castle had not been opened during the morning.

"It is strange!" said the Count. "If I hear not by twelve," he continued, "I must set off without waiting. Send forward a courier, Riquet, as fast as possible towards Paris, giving notice at the post-houses that I come with four

attendants, yourself one, and ordering horses to be prepared, for I must ride post to the capital. Have every thing ready in a couple of hours at the latest, for I must distance this morning's ordinary courier, and get to the court before him."

"If you ride as you usually do, my lord," replied the man, "you will easily do that, for you seldom fail to kill all the horses and all the postillions; and if your humble servant were composed of any thing but bones and a good wit, you would have worn the flesh off him long ago."

"I am in no mood for jesting, Riquet," replied the Count; "see that every thing is ready as I have said, and be prepared to accompany me."

Riquet, who was never yet known to have found too little time to do any thing on earth, took the rapid orders of his lord extremely coolly, aided him to dress, and then left him. He had scarcely been gone five minutes, however, before he returned with a face somewhat whiter than usual.

"What is the matter, sirrah?" cried the Count somewhat sharply.

"Why, my lord," he said, "here is the

mayor, and the adjoint, and the counsellors, arrived in great terror and trepidation, to tell you that Maillard, the carrier, coming down from the way of Nantes with his packhorses, has seen the body of a young officer tied to a tree, in the little wood of Jersel. He was afraid to meddle with it himself, and they were afraid to go down till they had come to tell you."

"Send the men up," said the Count, "and have horses saddled for me instantly."

"Now, Sir Mayor," he said, as the local magistrate entered, "what is the meaning of this? What are these news you bring?"

To say sooth, the mayor was somewhat embarrassed in presenting himself before the Count, as he had lately shown no slight symptoms of cowardly wavering in regard to the Protestant cause: nor would he have come now had he not been forced to do so by other members of the town council. He answered, then, with evident hesitation and timidity,—

"Terrible news, indeed, my Lord!—terrible news, indeed! This young man has been murdered, evidently; for he is tied to a tree, and a paper nailed above his head. So says Maillard, who was afraid to go near to read what was written; and then, my Lord, I was afraid to go

down without your Lordship's sanction, as you are *haut justicier* for a great way round."

The Count's lip curled with a scornful sneer. "It seems to me," he said, "that Maillard and yourself are two egregious cowards. We will dispense with your presence, Mr. Mayor; and these other gentlemen will go down with me at once to see what this business is. Though the man might be tied to a tree, and very likely much hurt, that did not prove that he was dead; and very likely he might have been recovered, or, at least, have received the sacraments of the church, if Maillard and yourself had thought fit to be speedy in your measures. Come, gentlemen, let us set out at once."

The rebuked mayor slunk away with a hanging head, and the rest of the municipal council, elated exactly in proportion to the depression of their chief, followed the young Count, who led the way with a party of his servants to the wood of Jersel. On first entering that part of the road which traversed the wood the party perceived nothing; and the good citizens of Morseiul drew themselves a little more closely together, affected by certain personal apprehensions in regard to meddling with the night's work of one who seemed both powerful and

unscrupulous. A moment after, however, the object which Maillard had seen was presented to their eyes, and, though crowding close together, curiosity got the better of fear, and they followed the Count up to the spot.

The moment the Count de Morseuil had heard the tale, he had formed his own conclusion, and in that conclusion he now found himself not wrong. The body that was tied to the tree was that of the young Marquis de Hericourt; but there were circumstances connected with the act of vengeance which had been thus perpetrated, that rendered it even more awful than he had expected, to the eyes of the Count de Morseuil.

There was no wound whatsoever upon the body, and the unhappy young man had evidently been tied to the tree before his death, for his hands, clenched in agony, were full of the large rugged bark of the elm, which he seemed to have torn off in dying. A strong rope round his middle pressed him tight against the tree. His arms and legs were also bound down to it, so that he could not escape; his hat and upper garments were off, and lying at a few yards' distance; and his shoulders and neck were bare, except where his throat was still

pressed by the instrument used for his destruction. That instrument was the usual veil of a novice in a Catholic convent, entirely soaked and dabbled in blood, and twisted tightly up into the form of a rope. It had been wound twice round his neck, and evidently tightened till he had died of strangulation. A piece of paper was nailed upon the tree above his head, so high up, indeed, as to be out of the reach of any one present; but on it was written in a large bold hand which could easily be read, these words:—

“The punishment inflicted on a murderer of the innocent, by Brown Keroual.”

The Count de Morseiul gazed upon the horrible object thus presented to him in deep silence, communing with his own heart; while the magistrates of the town, and the attendants, as is common with inferior minds, felt the awe less deeply, and talked it over with each other in an under voice.

“This is very horrible, indeed,” said the Count at length. “I think, before we do any thing in the business, as this gentleman was of the Roman Catholic faith, and an officer in the King’s service, we had better send down imme-

dately to the Curé of Maubourg, and ask him to come up to receive the body."

The word of the young Count was of course law to those who surrounded him, and one of his own attendants having been despatched for the Curé, the good man came up with four or five of the villagers in less than half an hour. His countenance, which was mild and benevolent, was very sad, for he had received from the messenger an account of what had taken place. The young Count, who had some slight personal knowledge of him, and knew him still better by reputation, advanced some way to meet him, saying —

" This is a dreadful event, Monsieur le Curé, and I have thought it better to send for you rather than move the body of this young gentleman myself, knowing him to have been a Catholic, while all of us here present were of a different faith. Had not life been evidently long extinguished," he continued, " we should not, of course, have scrupled in such a manner; but as it is, we have acted as we have done, in the hopes of meeting your own views upon the subject."

" You have done quite well, and wisely, my son," replied the Curé. " Would to God that

all dissensions in the church would cease, as I feel sure they would do, if all men would act as prudently as you have done."

"And as wisely and moderately as *you always do*, Monsieur le Curé," added the Count.

The Curé bowed his head, and advanced towards the tree, where he read the inscription over the head of the murdered man, and then gazed upon the veil that was round his throat.

He shook his head sadly as he did so, and then turning to the Count, he said, "Perhaps you do not know the key of all this sad story. I heard it before I came hither. This morning, an hour before matins, the bell of the religious house of St. Hermand — you know it well, Count, I dare say, a mile or so beyond the *chêne vert* — was rung loudly, and on the portress opening the gate, four men, with their faces covered, carried in the body of one of the novices, called Claire Duval, who had been absent the whole night, causing great alarm. There was a shot wound in her breast; she was laid out for the grave; and, though none of the men spoke a word, but merely placed the body in the lodge, and then retired, a paper was found with it afterwards, saying, "An innocent girl murdered by the base De Hericourt, and revenged by

Brown Keroual.—This, of course, I imagine, is the body of him called De Hericourt."

" It is, indeed, Sir," replied the Count, " the young Marquis de Hericourt, a relation not very distant of the Marquis de Louvois; and a brave, but rash, unprincipled, and weak young man he was. In your hands I leave the charge of the body, but any assistance that my servants can give you, or that my influence can procure, are quite at your service."

The Curé thanked him for his offer, but only requested that he would send him down some sort of a litter or conveyance, to carry the body to the church. The Count immediately promised to do so; and returning home he fulfilled his word. He then took some refreshment before his journey, wrote a brief note to the Duc de Rouvré, stating that he would have come over to see him immediately, but was obliged to go to Paris without loss of time; and then mounting his horse, and followed by his attendants, he rode to the first post-house, where taking post-horses, he proceeded at as rapid a pace as possible towards the capital.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COURT.

WE must once more — following the course of human nature as it is at all times, but more especially as it then was, before all the great asperities of the world were smoothed and softened down, and one universal railroad made life an easy and rapid course from one end to another — We must once more then, following the common course of being, shift the scene, and bring before our readers a new part of the great panorama of that day. It was then at the lordly palace of Versailles, in the time of its greatest and most extraordinary splendour, when the treasures of a world had been ransacked to adorn its halls, and art and genius had been called in to do what riches had been unable to accomplish ; while yet every chamber throughout the building flamed with those far-famed groups, cast in solid gold, the designs of which had proceeded from the pencil of Le Brun, and the execution of which had employed

a thousand of the most skilful hands in France; while yet marble, and porphyry, and jasper, shone in every apartment; and the rarest works, from every quarter of the world, were added to the richness of the other decorations: before, in short, the consequences of his own ambition, or his successor's faults and weaknesses, had stripped one splendid ornament from that extraordinary building, which Louis XIV. had erected in the noon of his splendour — it was then that took place the scene which we are about now to describe.

The Count de Morseuil had scarcely paused even to take needful rest on his way from Poitou to Paris, and he had arrived late at night at the untenanted dwelling of his fathers in the capital. The Counts de Morseuil had ever preferred the country to the town, and though they possessed a large house in the Place Royale, which then was, though it is now no longer a fashionable part of the city; that house had become, at it were, merely the dwelling-place of some old officers and attendants, who happened to have a lingering fondness for the busy haunts of men which their lord shared not in. The old white-headed porter, as he opened the gate for his young master, stared

with wonder and surprise to see him there, and nothing of course was found prepared for his reception. But the Count was easily satisfied and easily pleased. Food could always be procured without any difficulty, in the great capital of all eating, but repose was what the young Count principally required; and, after having despatched a messenger to Versailles, to ask in due form an audience of the King as early as possible on the following morning, to cast himself on the first bed that could be got ready, and forgot in a few minutes all the cares, and sorrows, and anxieties, which had accompanied him on his way to the capital.

The request for an audience was conveyed through the Marquis of Seignelai, with whom the Count himself was well acquainted; and he doubted not that it would be granted immediately, if he had preceded, as he had every reason to believe he had, the ordinary courier from Poitou, bringing the news of the events which had taken place in that province. The letter of the young secretary, in return to his application, arrived the next morning; but it was cold and formal, and evidently written under the immediate dictation of the King. It merely notified to the Count that, for the next three

days, the time appointed by his Majesty for business would be fully occupied; that, in the mean time, if the business which brought the Count to Paris were important, he would communicate it to the minister under whose department it came. The note went on to add, that if the business were not one requiring immediate despatch, the young Count would do well to come to Versailles, to signify the place of his abode at the palace, and to wait the monarch's leisure.

This was by no means the tone which Louis usually assumed towards one of the most gallant officers in his service; and, while the Count at once perceived that the King was offended with him on some account, he felt great difficulty in so shaping his conduct as to meet the exigency of the moment. As the only resource, he determined to see and interest Seignelai to obtain for him a more speedy audience; and he had the greater hopes of so doing, inasmuch as that minister was known to be jealous of and inimical to Louvois, one of the great persecutors of the Protestants.

While he was pondering over these things, and preparing to set out immediately for Versailles, another courier from the court arrived,

bearing with him a communication of a very different character, which, upon the whole, surprised the Count, even more than the former one had done. It contained a general invitation to all the evening entertainments of the court; specifying not only those to which the great mass of the French nobility were admitted as a matter of course, but the more private and select parties of the King, to which none in general but his own especial friends and favourites were ever invited.

This gave Albert of Morseul fresh matter for meditation, but also some hope that the King, whom he believed to be generous and kind-hearted, had remembered the services he and his ancestors had rendered to the state, and had consequently made an effort to overcome any feeling of displeasure which he might have entertained in consequence of reports from Poitiers. He determined, however, to pursue his plan with regard to Seignelai, believing that it would be facilitated rather than otherwise by any change of feeling which had come over the monarch, and he accordingly proceeded to Versailles at once.

The secretary of state was not to be found in his apartments, but one of his attendants in-

formed the Count that, at that hour, he would find him alone in the gardens, and he accordingly proceeded to seek him with all speed. As he passed by the orangery, however, he heard the sound of steps and gay voices speaking, and, in a moment after, stood in the presence of the King himself, who had passed through the orangery, and was now issuing forth into the gardens.

Louis was at this time a man of the middle age, above the ordinary height, and finely proportioned in all his limbs. Though he still looked decidedly younger than he really was, and the age of forty was perhaps as much as any one would have assigned him, judging from appearance, yet he had lost all the slightness of the youthful figure. He was robust, and even stout, though by no means corpulent, and the ease and grace with which he moved showed that no power was impaired. His countenance was fine and impressive, though, perhaps, it might not have afforded to a very scrutinising physiognomist any indication of the highest qualities of the human mind. All the features were good, some remarkably handsome, but in most there was some peculiar defect, some slight want which took away from the effect of the whole. The

expression was placable, but commanding, and grave rather than thoughtful ; and the impression produced by its aspect was, that it was serious, less from natural disposition or intense occupation of mind, than from the consciousness that it was a condescension for that countenance to smile. The monarch's carriage, as he walked, also produced an effect somewhat similar on those who saw him for the first time. Every step was dignified, stately, and graceful ; but there was something a little theatrical in the whole, joined with, or perhaps expressing, a knowledge that every step was marked and of importance.

The King's dress was exceedingly rich and costly ; and certainly though bad taste in costume was then at its height, the monarch and the group that came close upon his steps, formed as glittering and gay an object as could be seen.

Amongst those who followed the King, however, were several ecclesiastics, and to the surprise of the young Count de Morseuil, one of those on whom his eye first fell was no other than the Abbé Pelisson, in eager but low conversation with the Bishop of Meaux. Louis himself was speaking with a familiar tone, alternately to the Prince de Marsillac, and to the

well known financier Bechameil, whose exquisite taste in pictures, statues, and other works of art, recommended him greatly to the monarch.

No sooner did the King's look rest upon the young Count de Morseiul, than his brow became as dark as a thunder cloud, and he stopped suddenly in his walk. Scarcely had the Count time to remark that angry expression, however, before it had entirely passed away, and a grave and dignified smile succeeded. It was a common remark, at that time, that the King was to be judged by those who sought him, from his first aspect, and certainly, if that were the test in the present instance, his affection for the Count of Morseiul was but small.

Louis was conscious that he had displayed bad feelings more openly than he usually permitted himself to do; and he now hastened to repair that fault, not by affecting the direct contrary sentiments, as some might have done, but by softening down his tone and demeanour to the degree of dignified disapprobation, which they might naturally be supposed to have reached.

"Monsieur de Morseiul," he said, as the young nobleman approached, "I am glad, yet

sorry, to see you. There are various reports have reached me from Poitou tending to create a belief that you have been, in some degree, wanting in due respect to my will ; and I should have been glad that the falsehood of those reports had been proved before you again presented yourself. Your services, Sir, however, are not forgotten, and you have, on so many occasions, shown devotion, obedience, and gallantry, which might well set an example to the whole world, that I cannot believe there is any truth in what I have heard, and am willing, unless a painful conviction to the contrary is forced upon me, to look upon you, till the whole of this matter be fully investigated, in the same light as ever.”

The King paused a moment, as if for reply ; and the Count de Morseiul gladly seized the opportunity of saying, “I came up post, Sire, last night, from Morseiul, for the purpose of casting myself at your Majesty’s feet, and entreating you to believe that I would never willingly give you the slightest just cause for offence, in word, thought, or deed. I apprehended that some false or distorted statements, either made for the purpose of deceiving your Majesty, or originating in erroneous impres-

sions, might have reached you concerning my conduct, as I know misapprehensions of my conduct had occurred in Poitiers itself. Such being the case, and various very painful events having taken place, I felt it my duty to beseech your Majesty to grant me an audience, in order that I might lay before you the pure and simple facts, which I am ready to vouch for on the honour of a French gentleman. I am most desirous, especially with regard to the latter events which have taken place, that your Majesty should be at once made aware of the facts as they really occurred, lest any misrepresentations should reach your ears, and prepare your mind to take an unfavourable view of acts which were performed in all loyalty, and with the most devoted affection to your Majesty's person."

The young Count spoke with calm and dignified boldness. There was no hesitation, there was no wavering, there was no apprehension either in tone, manner, or words; and there was something in his whole demeanour which set at defiance the very thought of there being the slightest approach to falsehood or artifice in his nature. The King felt that it was so himself, notwithstanding many prejudices on all the questions which could arise between the

Count and himself. But his line of conduct, by this time, had been fully determined, and he replied, "As I caused you to be informed this morning, Monsieur de Morseiul, my arrangements do not permit me to give you so much time as will be necessary for the hearing of all you have to say for several days. In the mean while, however, fear not that your cause will be, in any degree, prejudged. We have already, by a courier arrived this morning, received full intelligence of all that has lately taken place in Poitou, and of the movements of some of our misguided subjects of the pretended reformed religion. We have ordered accurate information to be obtained upon the spot, by persons who cannot be considered as prejudiced, and we will give you audience as soon as such information has been fully collected. In the mean time you will remain at the court, and be treated here, in every respect, as a favoured and faithful servant, which will show you that no unjust prejudice has been created; though it is not to be denied that the first effect of the tidings we received from Poitou was to excite considerable anger against you. However, you owe a good deal, in those respects, to Monsieur Pelisson, who bore witness to your having gal-

lantly defended his life from a bad party of robbers, and to your having saved from the flames a commission under our hand, although that commission was afterwards unaccountably abstracted. I hope to hear," the King continued, "of your frequenting much the society of Monsieur Pelisson, and our respected and revered friend the Bishop of Meaux, by which you may doubtless derive great advantage, and perhaps arrive at those happy results which would make it our duty, as well as our pleasure, to favour you in the very highest degree."

The meaning of Louis was too evident to be mistaken; and, as the Count de Morseul had not the slightest intention of encouraging even a hope that he would abandon the creed of his ancestors, he merely bowed in reply, and the King passed on. The Count was then about to retire immediately from the gardens, but Pelisson caught him by the sleeve as he passed, saying in a low voice, —

"Come on, Monsieur de Morseul, come on after the King. Believe me, I really wish you well; and it is of much consequence that you should show not only your attachment to his Majesty, by presenting yourself constantly at the court, but also that you are entering into

none of the intrigues of those who are irritating him by opposition and cabals. You know Monsieur Bossuet, of course. Let us come on."

"I only know Monsieur Bossuet by reputation," replied the Count, bowing to the Bishop who had paused also, and at the same time turning to follow the royal train. "I only know him by reputation, as who, throughout France, nay, throughout Europe, does not?"

"The compliment will pass for Catholic, though it comes from a Protestant mouth," said one of two gentlemen who had been obliged to pause also by the halt of the party before them. But neither Bossuet nor the Count took any notice, but walked on, entering easily into conversation with each other; the eloquent prelate, who was not less keen and dexterous than he was zealous and learned, accommodating himself easily to the tone of the young Count.

Pelisson, ere they had gone far, was inclined to have drawn the conversation to religious subjects, and was a little anxious to prove to the Count de Morseil that, at the bottom, there was very little real difference between the Catholic and the Protestant faith, from which starting-point he intended to argue, as was his common custom, that as there was so

little difference, and as in all the points of difference that did exist the Catholics were in the right, it was a bounden duty for every Protestant to renounce his heretical doctrines, and embrace the true religion.

Bossuet, however, was much more politic, and resisted all Pelisson's efforts to introduce such topics, by cutting across them immediately, and turning the conversation to something less evidently applicable to the Count de Morseuil. Something was said upon the subject of Jansenism, indeed, as they walked along; and Bossuet replied, smiling, —

“ Heaven forbid that those discussions should be renewed! I abhor controversy, and always avoid it, except when driven to it. I am anxious indeed, most anxious, that all men should see and renounce errors, and especially anxious, as I am in duty bound, when those errors are of such a nature as to affect their eternal salvation. But very little good, I doubt, has ever been done by controversy, though certainly still less by persecution; and if we were to choose between those two means, controversy would of course be the best. Unfortunately, however, it seldom ends but as a step to the other.”

There was something so moderate and so

mild in the language of the prelate, that the young Count soon learned to take great pleasure in his discourse; and after these few brief words concerning religion, the Bishop of Meaux drew the conversation to arts and sciences, and the great improvements of every kind which had taken place in France under the government of Louis XIV.

They were still speaking on this subject when the King turned at the end of the terrace, and with surprise saw the Count de Morseul in his train, between Pelisson and Bossuet. A smile of what appeared to be dignified satisfaction came over the monarch's countenance, and as he passed he asked,—

“ What are you discussing so eagerly, Monsieur de Meaux ?”

“ We are not discussing, sire,” replied the Bishop, “ for we are all of one opinion. Monsieur de Morseul was saying that in all his knowledge of history—which we know is very great—he cannot find one monarch whose reign has produced so great a change in society as that of Louis the Great.”

The King smiled graciously, and passed on. But the same sarcastic personage, who followed close behind the party to which the Count had

attached himself, added to Bossuet's speech, almost loud enough for the King to hear, " Except Mahomet ! Except Mahomet, Monsieur de Meaux !"

It was impossible either for the Bishop, or the Count, or Pelisson, to repress a smile ; but the only one of the party who turned to look was the Count, the others very well knowing the voice to be that of Villiers, whose strange method of paying court to Louis XIV. was by abusing every thing on which the monarch prided himself. He was slightly acquainted with the Count de Morseuil, having met him more than once on service, and seeing him turn his head, he came up and joined them.

" You spoil that man, all of you," he said, speaking of the King. " All the world flatters him, till he does not know what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, what is beautiful and what is ugly. — Now, as we stand here upon this terrace," he continued, " and look down over those gardens, is there any thing to be seen on the face of the earth more thoroughly and completely disgusting than they are ? Is it possible for human ingenuity to devise any thing so mathematically detestable ? One would suppose that La Hire, or

Cassini, or some of the other clockmakers, had been engaged with their villainous compasses in marking out all those rounds, and triangles, and squares, so that the whole park and gardens, when seen, from my little room (which the King in his immense generosity gave me in the garret story of the palace), look exactly like a dusty leaf torn out of Euclid's Elements, with all the problems demonstrated upon it. Then, Monsieur de Morseiul, do pray look at those basins and statues. Here you have a set of black tadpoles croaking at an unfortunate woman in the midst, as black as themselves. There you have a striking representation of Neptune gone mad—perhaps it was meant for a storm at sea; and certainly, from the number of people death-sick all round, and pouring forth from their mouths into the basins, one might very easily conceive it to be so. There is not one better than another, and yet the King walks about amongst them all, and thinks it the finest thing that ever was seen upon the face of the earth, and has at this moment five-and-twenty thousand men working hard, to render it, if possible, uglier than before."

The Count de Morseiul smiled; and, although he acknowledged that he loved the fair face of

the country, unshaven and unornamented better than all that art could do, yet he said, that for the gardens of such a palace as that of Versailles, where solemn and reposing grandeur was required, and regular magnificence more than picturesque beauty, he did not see that better could have been done.

Thus passed the conversation, till the King, after having taken another turn, re-entered the building, and his courtiers quitted him at the foot of the staircase. The Count then inquired of Pelisson where he could best lodge in Versailles, and the Abbé pointed out to him a handsome house, very near that in which the Bishop of Meaux had taken up his abode for the time.

“Do you intend to come speedily to Versailles?” demanded the Bishop.

“As I understood the King,” replied the Count, “it is his pleasure that I should do so; and consequently I shall merely go back to Paris to make my arrangements, and then return hither with all speed. I propose to be back by seven or eight o’clock this evening, if this house is still to be had.”

“For that I can answer,” replied the Bishop. “The only disagreeable thing you will find here is a want of food,” he added, laughing, “for the

palace swallows up all ; but if you will honour me by supping with me to-night, Monsieur le Comte, perhaps Monsieur Pelisson will join us, with one or two others, and we may spend a calm and pleasant evening, in talking over such things as chance or choice may select. We do so often in my poor abode. But indeed I forgot ; perhaps you may prefer going to the theatre at the palace, for this is one of the nights when a play is performed there."

" No, indeed," replied the Count. " I hold myself not only flattered, but obliged, by your invitation, Monsieur de Meaux, and I will not fail to be with you at any hour you appoint."

The hour was accordingly named ; and, taking his leave, the young Count de Morseil sought his horses, and returned to Paris. His visit to Versailles, indeed, had not been so satisfactory as he could have wished ; and while Jerome Riquet was making all the preparations for his master's change of abode, the Count himself leaned his head upon his hand, and revolved in deep thought all the bearings of his present situation.

No one knew better than he did, that appearances are but little to be trusted at any court, and as little as in any other at the court

of Louis XIV. He knew that the next word from the King's mouth might be an order to conduct him to the Bastile, and that very slight proofs of guilt would be required to change his adherence to his religion, if not into a capital crime, at least into a pretext for dooming him to perpetual imprisonment. He saw, also, though perhaps not to the full extent of the King's design, that Louis entertained some hopes of his abandoning his religion; and he doubted not that various efforts would be employed to induce him to do so — efforts difficult to be parried, painful to him to be the object of, and which might, perhaps, afford matter for deep offence if they proved ineffectual.

He saw, and he knew too, that it was decidedly the resolution of the King and of his advisers to put down altogether the Protestant religion in France; that there was no hope, that there was no chance of mitigating, in any degree, the unchangeable spirit of intolerance.

All these considerations urged the young Count to pursue a plan which had suggested itself at first to his mind, rather as the effect of despair than of calculation. It was to go back no more to Versailles; to return post-haste to Poitou; to collect with all speed the principal

Protestants who might be affected by any harsh measures of the court; to demand of Clémence de Marly the fulfilment of her promise to fly with him; and, embarking with the rest at the nearest port, to seek safety and peace in another land.

The more he thought over this design the more he was inclined to adopt it; for although he evidently saw that tidings of what had taken place at the preaching in the desert had already reached the King's ears, and that the first effect was passed, yet he could not rely by any means upon the sincerity of the demeanour assumed towards him, and believed that even though he — if his military services were required — might be spared from political considerations, yet the great majority of the Protestants might be visited with severe inflictions, on account of the part they had taken in the transactions of that day.

One consideration alone tended to make him pause ere he executed this purpose, which was, that having undertaken a task he was bound to execute it, and not to shrink from it while it was half completed; and, though anxious to do what he considered right in all things, he feared that by flying he might but be able to

protect a few, while by remaining he might stand between many and destruction.

In this world we ponder and consider, and give time, and care, and anxiety, and thought to meditation over different lines of conduct, while calm, imperturbable fate stands by till the appointed moment, and then, without inquiring the result, decides the matter for us. The Count had sent a servant immediately after his return from Versailles to the house of Marshal Schomberg, to inquire whether that officer were in Paris, and if so, at what hour he would be visible. The servant returned bringing word that Marshal Schomberg had quitted the country, that his house and effects had been sold, and that it was generally supposed he never intended to return.

This was an example of the prompt execution of a resolution, which might well have induced the Count de Morseuil to follow it, especially as it showed Schomberg's opinion to be, that the affairs of the Protestants in France were utterly irretrievable, and that the danger to those who remained was imminent. Thus was another weight cast into the scale; but even while he was rising from the table at which he sat, in order to give direc-

tions for preparing for a still longer journey than that which he had notified to his servants before, Jerome Riquet entered the room and placed before him a note, written in a hand with which he was not at all acquainted.

“ You have thought much of my conduct strange, Albert — ” it began; and turning at once to the other page he saw the name of Clémence. “ You have thought much of my conduct strange, and now will you not think it still stranger, when I tell you that I have but two moments to write to you, and not even a moment to see you ? I looked forward to tomorrow with hope and expectation ; and now I suddenly learn that we are to set off within an hour for Paris. The order has been received from the King : the Duke will not make a moment’s delay : for me to stay here alone is, of course, impossible ; and I am obliged to leave Poitou without seeing you, without the possibility even of receiving an answer. Pray write to me immediately in Paris. Tell me that you forgive me for an involuntary fault ; tell me that you forgive me for any thing I may have done to pain you. I say so, because your last look seemed to be reproachful ; and yet, believe me,

when I tell you upon my honour, that I could not but act as I have acted.

“ Oh, Albert ! if I could but see you in Paris ! I, who used to be so bold—I, who used to be so fearless, now feel as if I were going into a strange world, where there is need of protection, and guidance, and direction. I feel as if I had given up all control over myself; and if you were near me, if you were in Paris, I should have greater confidence, I should have greater courage, I should have more power to act, to speak, even to think rightly, than I have at present. Come, then, if it be possible, come then, if it be right; and if not, at all events write to me soon, write to me immediately.

“ May I,—yes I may, for I feel it is true — call myself

“ Your Clémence.”

The letter was dated on the very day that the Count himself had set off, and had evidently been sent over to the château of Morseul shortly after his departure. Maître Riquet had contrived to linger in the room on one pretext or another while his master read the note, and the Count, turning towards him, demanded

eagerly how it had come, and who had brought it.

“ Why, Monseigneur,” replied the man, “ the truth is, I always love to have a little information. In going through life I have found it like a snuff-box, which one should always carry; even if one does not take snuff one’s self: it is so useful for one’s friends ! ”

“ Come, come, Sir, to the point,” said his master. “ How did this letter arrive? that is the question.”

“ Just what I was going to tell you, my Lord,” replied the man. “ I left behind me Pierre Martin to gather together a few stray things which I could not carry with me, and a few stray pieces of information which I could not learn myself, and to bring them after us to Paris with all speed; old doublets, black silk stockings, bottles of essence, cases of razors, true information regarding all the reports in the county of Poitou, and whatever letters might have arrived between our going and his coming.”

“ In the latter instance,” replied the Count, “ you have done wisely, and more thoughtfully than myself. I do believe, Riquet, as you once said of yourself, you never forget any thing that is necessary.”

“ You do me barely justice, Sir,” replied the man, “ for I remember always a great deal more than is necessary ; so, seeing that the letter was in a lady’s hand, I brought it you, my Lord, at once, without even waiting to look in at the end ; which, perhaps, was imprudent, as very likely now I shall never be able to ascertain the contents.”

“ You are certainly not without your share of impudence, Maître Jerome,” replied his master ; “ which I suppose you would say is amongst your other good qualities. But now leave me ; for I must think over this letter.”

Riquet prepared to obey, but as he opened the door for his own exit, he drew two or three steps back, throwing it much wider, and giving admission to the Prince de Marsillac. His appearance did not by any means surprise the Count, for although he had seen him that very morning at Versailles, he had obtained not a moment to speak with him ; and, as old friends, it was natural that, if any thing brought the Prince to Paris, he should call at the Hôtel de Morseil, to talk over all that had taken place since their last meeting at Poitiers.

“ My dear Count,” he said, “ understanding from Monsieur de Meaux that you return to

Versailles to-night, I have come to offer you a place down in my carriage, or to take a place in yours, that we may have a long chat over the scenes at Poitiers, and over the prospects of this good land of ours."

"Willingly," said the Count. "I have no carriage with me, but I will willingly accompany you in yours. What time do you go?"

"As soon as you will," replied the Prince. "I am ready to set out directly. I have finished all that I had to do in Paris, and return at once."

The Count paused for a moment to calculate in his own mind whether it were possible that the Due de Rouvré could reach Paris that night. Considering, however, the slow rate at which he must necessarily travel, accompanied by all his family, Albert of Morsieul saw that one, if not two days more, must elapse before his arrival.

"Well," he said, having by this time determined at all events to pause in the neighbourhood of the capital till after he had seen Clémence—"Well, as I have not dined, old friend, I will go through that necessary ceremony, against which my man Riquet has doubtless prepared, and then I will be ready to accompany you."

"Nor have I dined either," replied the Prince; "so if you will give a knife and fork to one you justly call an old friend I will dine with you, and we will send for the carriage in the meanwhile."

There was something in the Prince's tone and manner, difficult to describe or to explain, which struck the Count as extraordinary. The calmest, the coolest, the most self-possessed man in France was a little embarrassed. But the Count made no remark, merely looking for a moment in his face — somewhat steadfastly indeed, and in such a manner that the other turned to the window, saying, in a careless tone, "It was under those trees, I think, that the Duke of Guise killed Coligny."

The Count made no reply, but called some of his attendants, and bade them see what had been provided for dinner. In a few minutes it was announced as ready, and he sat down with his friend to table, doing the honours with perfect politeness and cheerfulness. Before the meal was concluded, it was announced that the Prince's carriage and servants had arrived, and, when all was ready, the Count de Morseil proposed that they should depart, leaving his attendants to follow. Just as he had his foot upon

the step of the carriage, however, the Count turned to his friend, and said, "You have forgot, my good friend, to tell the coachman whether he is to drive to the Bastile, or Vincennes, or to Versailles."

"You mistake," said the Prince, following him into the carriage: "To Versailles, of course. I will explain to you the whole matter as we go. Within ten minutes after you left Versailles this morning," he continued, as soon as they were once fully on the way, "I was sent for to the King about something referring to my post of Grand Veneur. I found Louvois with him in one of his furious and insolent moods, and the King bearing all with the utmost patience. It soon became apparent that the conversation referred to you, Louvois contending that you should never have been suffered to quit Versailles till some affairs that have taken place in Poitou were fully examined, declaring that you had only gone to Paris in order to make your escape from the country more conveniently. The King asked me my opinion; and I laughed at the idea to Louvois's face. He replied that I did not know all, or half, indeed, for that if I did I should not feel nearly so certain. I said I knew you better; and, to settle the matter at once, I

added that, as I was going to Paris, I would undertake you came back with me in my carriage or I in yours. The King trusted me, as you see; and I thought it a great deal better to come in this manner as a friend, than to let Louvois send you a *lettre de cachet*, which you might even find a more tiresome companion than the Prince de Marsillac."

"Undoubtedly I should," replied the Count, "and I thank you much for the interest you have taken in the affair as well as for the candour of the confession. But now, my friend, since you have gone so far, go a little farther, and give me some insight, if you can, into what is taking place at the court just at present — I mean in reference to myself — for my situation is, as you may suppose, not the most pleasant; and is one in which a map of the country may be serviceable to me. I see none of my old friends about the court at present except yourself. Seignelai I have not been able to find — — "

"And he would give you no information even if you did find him," replied the Prince. "I can give you but very little, for I know but little. In the first place, however, let me tell you a great secret ; that you are strongly suspected of being a Protestant."

"Indeed," replied the Count; "I fear they have more than suspicion against me there."

"Confess it not," said his friend, "confess it not! for just at present, it would be much more safe to confess high treason: but, in the next place, my dear Count, a report has gone abroad — quite false I know — that you are desperately in love with this fair Clémence de Marly."

"And pray," demanded the Count, smiling, "in what manner would that affect me at the court, even were it true?"

"Why, now, to answer seriously," replied his friend, "though, remember I speak only from the authority of my own imagination, I should say, that you are very likely to obtain her, with every sort of honour and distinction to boot, in spite of Hericourt and the Chevalier d'Evran, and all the rest, upon one small condition; which is, that you take a morning's walk into the Church of St. Laurent, or any other that may be more pleasant to you; stay about half an hour, read a set form, which means little or nothing, and go through some other ceremonies of the same kind."

"In fact," said the Count, "make my renunciation in form, you mean to say."

The Prince nodded his head, and Albert of Morseiul fell into thought, well knowing that his friend was himself ignorant of one of the most important considerations of the whole; namely, the faith of Clémence de Marly herself. On that subject, of course, he did not choose to say any thing; but after remaining in thought for a few moments, he demanded, —

“ And pray, my good friend, what is to be the result, if I do not choose to make this renunciation ?”

“ Heaven only knows,” replied the Prince. “ There are, at least, six or seven different sorts of fate that may befall you. Probably the choice will be left to yourself; whether you will have your head struck off in a gentlemanly way in the court of the Bastile, or be broken on the wheel; though I believe that process they are keeping for the Huguenot priests now, — ministers as you call them. If the King should be exceeding merciful, the castle of Pignerol, or the prison in the isle St. Marguerite, may afford you a comfortable little solitary dwelling for the rest of your life. I don’t think it likely that he should send you to the galleys, though I am told they are pretty full of military men now. But if

I were you, I would choose the axe : it is soonest over."

" I think I should prefer a bullet," said the Count ; " but we shall see, my good friend, though I can't help thinking your anticipations are somewhat more sanguinary than necessary. I hear that Schomberg has taken his departure, and it must have been with the King's permission. Why should it not be the same in my case ? I have served the king as well, though, perhaps, not quite so long."

" But you are a born subject of France," replied the other ; " Schomberg is not ; and, besides, Schomberg has given no offence, except remaining faithful to his religion. You have been heading preaching in the open fields they say, if not preaching yourself."

" Certainly not the last," replied the Count.

" Indeed !" said his friend ; " they have manufactured a story, then, of your having addressed the people before any one else."

" Good God !" exclaimed the Count ; " is it possible that people can pervert one's actions in such a manner ? I merely besought the people to be orderly and tranquil, and added a hope that they had come unarmed as I had come."

" It would seem that a number of you were

armed, however," said the Prince, " for some of the dragoons were killed it would appear ; and, on my word, you owe a good deal to Pelisson ; for if Louvois had obtained his way this morning, as usual, your head would have been in no slight danger. The Abbé stepped in, however, and said, that he had seen much of you in Poitou, and that from all he had heard and seen, his Majesty had not a more faithful or obedient subject in those parts."

" I am certainly very much obliged to him," replied the Count. " But he has strangely altered his tone ; for at Poitiers he would fain have proved me guilty of all sorts of acts that I never committed."

" Perhaps he may have had cause to change," replied the Prince de Marsillac. It is known that he and St. Helie quarrelled violently before Pelisson's return. But at all events, your great security is in the fact, that there are two factions in the party who are engaged in putting down your sect. The one would do it by gentle means — bribery, corruption, persuasion, and the soft stringents of exclusion from place, rank, and emolument. The other breathes nothing but fire and blood, the destruction of rebels to the royal will, and the most signal punishment for

all who differ in opinion from themselves. This last party would fain persuade the king that the Huguenots are in arms, or ready to take arms, throughout France, and that nothing is to be done but to send down armies to subdue them. But then the others come in and say, ‘It is no such thing ; the people are all quiet ; they are submitting with a good grace, and if you do not drive them to despair, they will gradually return, one by one, to the bosom of the mother church, rather than endure all sorts of discomfort and disgrace !’ Of this party are Pelisson, the good Bishop, and many other influential people ; but, above all, Madame de Maintenon, whose power, in every thing but this, is supreme.”

“ Had I not better see her,” demanded the Count, “ and endeavour to interest her in our favour ?”

“ She dare not for her life receive you,” replied the Prince. “ What is religion, or humanity, or generosity, or any thing else to her if it stand in the way of ambition ? No, no, Morseiul ! the good lady may perhaps speak a kind word for you in secret, and when it can be put in the form of an insinuation ; but she is no Madame de Montespan who would have defended the innocent,

and thrust herself in the way to prevent injustice, even if the blow had fallen upon herself. She dared to say to the King things that no other mortal dared, and would say them too, when her heart, or her understanding was convinced ; but Madame de Maintenon creeps towards the crown, and dares not do a good action if it be a dangerous one. Do not attempt to see her, for she would certainly refuse ; and if she thought that the very application had reached the King's ears, she would urge him to do something violent, merely to show him that she had nothing to do with you."

" She has had much to do with me and mine," replied the Count, somewhat bitterly ; " for to my father, she and her mother owed support when none else would give it."

" She owed her bread to Madame de Montespan," replied the Prince, " and yet ceased not her efforts till she had supplanted her. But," he added, after a pause, " she is not altogether bad, either, and it is not improbable, that if there be any scheme going on for converting you by milder means than the wheel, as I believe there is, she may be the deviser of it. She was in the room this morning when the business was taking place between the King, Louvois, and

Pelisson. She said nothing, but sat working at a distance, the very counterpart of a pie-bald cat that sat dozing in the corner ; but she heard all, and I remarked that when the affair was settled, and other things began, she beckoned Pelisson to look at her embroidery, and spoke to him for some minutes in a low voice."

" Morseiul, may I advise you ?" the Prince continued, after a brief interval had taken place in the conversation ; " listen to me but one word ! I know well that there is no chance of your changing your religion except upon conviction. Do not, however, enact the old Roman, or court too much the fate of martyrdom ; but without taking any active step in the matter, let the whole plans of these good folks, as far as they affect yourself, go on unopposed : let them, in short, still believe that it is not impossible to convert you. Listen to Pelisson — pay attention to Bossuet — watch the progress of events — be converted if you can ; and if not, you, at all events, will gain opportunities of retiring from the country with far greater ease and safety than at present, if you should be driven to such a step at last. In the mean time, this affair of the preaching will have blown over, and they will not dare to revive it against you if they let it

slumber for some time. Think of it, Morseiul! — think of it!"

"I will," replied the Count, "and thank you sincerely; and indeed will do all that may be done with honour, not to offend the king or endanger myself;" and thus the conversation ended on that subject; the Prince having said already far more than might have been expected from a courtier of Louis XIV.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLOUDS AND THE SUNSHINE.

THE Count de Morseuil had just time to take possession of his new abode, and make himself tolerably at his ease therein, before the hour arrived for proceeding to the house of the Bishop of Meaux, where he was received by the prelate with every sort of kindness.

He arrived before any body else, and Bossuet took him by the hand, saying, with a smile, “Some of our good clergy, Monsieur de Morseuil, would perhaps be scandalized at receiving in their house so distinguished a Protestant as yourself; but I trust you know, what I have always endeavoured to prove, that I look upon all denominations of Christians as my brethren, and am only perhaps sometimes a little eager with them, out of what very likely you consider an *over-anxiety*, to induce them to embrace those doctrines which I think necessary to their salvation. Should it ever be so between you

and me, Monsieur le Comte, will you forgive me?"

"Willingly," replied the Count, thinking that the work of conversion was about to begin; but, to his surprise, Bossuet immediately changed the conversation, and turned it to the subject of the little party he had invited to meet the Count.

"I have not," he said, "made it, as indeed I usually do, almost entirely of churchmen; for I feared you might think that I intended to overwhelm you under ecclesiastical authority: however, we have some belonging to the church, whom you will be glad to meet, if you do not know them already. The Abbé Renaudot will be here, who has a peculiar faculty for acquiring languages, such as I never knew in any one but himself. He understands no less than seventeen foreign languages, and twelve of those he speaks with the greatest facility. That, however, is one of his least qualities, as you may yourself judge when I tell you, that in this age, where interest and ambition swallow up every thing, he is the most disinterested man that perhaps ever lived. Possessed of one very small, poor benefice which gives him a scanty subsistence, he has constantly refused every

other preferment; and no persuasion will induce him to do what he terms, ‘encumber himself with wealth.’ We shall also have La Broue, with whose virtues and good qualities you are already acquainted. D’Herbelot also wrote yesterday to invite himself. He has just returned from Italy, where that reverence was shown to him, which generous and expansive minds are always ready to display towards men of genius and of learning. He was received by the Grand Duke at Florence, and treated like a sovereign prince, though merely a poor French scholar. A house was prepared for him, the Secretary of State met him, and, as a parting present, a valuable library of oriental manuscripts was bestowed upon him by the Duke himself. To these grave people we have joined our lively friend Pelisson, and one whom doubtless you know, Boileau Despréaux. One cannot help loving him, and being amused with him, although we are forced to acknowledge that his sarcasm and his bitterness go a good deal too far. When he was a youth, they tell me, he was the best tempered boy in the world, and his father used to say of him, that all his other children had some sharpness and some talent, but that as for Nicholas, he was a good-natured

lad, who would never speak ill of any one. One thing, however, I must tell you to his honour. He obtained some time ago, as I lament to say has frequently been done, a benefice in the church without being an ecclesiastic. The revenues of the benefice he spent, in those his young days, in lightness, if not in vice. He has since changed his conduct and his views, and not long ago, not only resigned the benefice, but paid back from his own purse all that he had received, to be spent in acts of charity amongst the deserving of the neighbourhood. This merits particular notice and record."

Bossuet was going on to mention several others who were likely to join their party, when two of those whom he had named arrived, and the others shortly after made their appearance. The evening passed, as such an evening may well be supposed to have passed, at the dwelling of the famous Bishop of Meaux. It was cheerful, though not gay; and subjects of deep and important interest were mingled with, and enlivened by many a light and lively sally, confined within the bounds of strict propriety, but none the less brilliant or amusing, for it is only weak and narrow intellects that are forced to fly to themes painful, injurious, or offensive, in order

to seek materials with which to found a reputation for wit or talent.

The only matter, however, which was mentioned affecting at all the course of our present tale, and therefore the only one on which we shall pause, was discussed between Pelisson and the Abbé Renaudot, while the Count de Morseul was standing close by them, speaking for a moment with D'Herbelot.

"Is there any news stirring at the court, Monsieur Pelisson?" said Renaudot. "You hear every thing, and I hear nothing of what is going on there."

"Why there is nothing of any consequence, I believe," said Pelisson, in a loud voice. "The only thing now I hear of is, that Mademoiselle Marly is going to be married at length."

"What, La belle Clémence!" cried Renaudot. "Who is the man that has touched her hard heart at length?"

"Oh, an old lover," said Pelisson. "Perseverance has carried the day. The Chevalier d'Evran is the man. The King gave his consent some few days ago, the Chevalier having come up express from Poitou to ask it."

Every word reached the ear of the Count de Morseul, and his mind reverted instantly to

the conduct of the Chevalier and Clémence, and to the letter which he had received from her. As any man in love would do, under such circumstances, he resolved not to believe a word; but as most men in love would feel, he certainly felt himself not a little uneasy, not a little agitated, not a little pained even by the report. Unwilling, however, to hear any more, he walked to the other end of the room to take his leave, as it was now late.

Pelisson looked after him as he went, and seeing him bid Bossuet adieu, he followed his example, and accompanied the young Count down the stairs and throughout the few steps he had to take ere he reached his own dwelling. No word, however, was spoken by either regarding Clémence de Marly, and Albert of Morseil retired at once, though certainly not to sleep. He revolved in his mind again and again the probability of Pelisson's story having any truth in it. He knew Clémence, and he knew the Chevalier, and he felt sure that he could trust them both; but that trust was all that he had to oppose to the very great likelihood which there existed, that the King, as he so frequently did, would take the arrangement of a marriage for Clémence de Marly into his

own hands, without in the slightest degree consulting her inclination, or the inclination of any one concerned.

The prospect now presented to the mind of Albert of Morseil was in the highest degree painful. Fresh difficulties, fresh dangers, were added to the many which were already likely to overwhelm him, if even, as he trusted she would, Clémence held firm by her plighted troth to him, and resisted what was then so hard to resist in France, the absolute will of the King. Still this new incident would only serve to show that instant flight was more absolutely necessary than before, would render any return to France utterly impossible, and would increase the danger and difficulty of executing that flight itself. But a question suggested itself to the Count's mind, which, though he answered it in the affirmative, left anxiety and doubt behind it. Would Clémence de Marly resist the will of the King? Could she do so? So many were the means to be employed to lead or drive her to obedience, so much might be done by leading her on from step to step, that bitter, very bitter anxiety took possession of her lover's heart. He persuaded himself that it was pain and anxiety on her account alone; but still he loved her too

well, too truly, not to feel pained and anxious for himself.

On the following morning, as soon as he had breakfasted, he wrote a brief note to Clémence, telling her that he was at Versailles, was most anxious to see her and converse with her, if it were but for a few minutes, and beseeching her to let him know immediately where he could do so speedily, as he had matters of very great importance to communicate to her at once. The letter was tender and affectionate; but still there was that in it, which might show the keen eyes of love that there was some great doubt and uneasiness pressing on the mind of the writer.

As soon as the letter was written, he gave it into the hands of Jerome Riquet, directing him to carry it to Paris, to wait there for the arrival of the family of de Rouvré, if they had not yet come, and to find means to give it to Maria, the attendant of Mademoiselle de Marly. He was too well aware of Riquet's talents not to be quite sure that this commission would be executed in the best manner; and after his departure he strove to keep his mind as quiet as possible, and occupied himself in

writing to his intendant at Morseil, conveying orders for his principal attendants to come up to join him at Versailles directly, bringing with them a great variety of different things which were needful to him, but which had been left behind in the hurry of his departure. While he was writing, he was again visited by the Prince de Marsillac, who came in kindly to tell him that the report of Pelisson, who had passed the preceding evening with him, seemed to be operating highly in his favour at court.

“ I am delighted,” he said, “ that the good Abbé has had the first word, for St. Helie is expected to-night, and, depend upon it, his story would be very different. It will not be listened to now, however,” he continued; “ and every day gained, depend upon it, is something. Take care, however, Count,” he said, pointing to the papers on the table, “ take care of your correspondence; for though the King himself is above espionage, Louvois is not, I can tell you, and unless you send your letters by private couriers of your own, which might excite great suspicion, every word is sure to be known.”

“ I was going to send this letter by a private courier,” said the Count; “ but as it is only intended to order up the rest of my train from

Poitou, and some matters of that kind, I care not if it be known to-morrow."

" If it be to order up your train," replied the Prince, " send it through Louvois himself. Write him a note instantly, saying, that as you understand he has a courier going, you will be glad if he will despatch that letter. It will be opened, read, and the most convincing proof afforded to the whole of them, that you have no intention of immediate flight, which is the principal thing they seem to apprehend. With this, clenching the report of Pelisson, you may set St. Helie at defiance, I should think."

The Count smiled. " Heaven deliver me from the intrigues of a court," he said. He did, however, as he was advised ; and the Prince de Marsillac carried off the letter and the note, promising to have them delivered to Louvois immediately.

Several hours then passed anxiously, and although he knew that he could not receive an answer till two or three o'clock, and might perhaps not receive one at all that day, he could not help thinking the time long, and, marking the striking of the palace clock, as if it must have gone wrong for his express torment. The shortest possible space of time,

however, in which it was possible to go and come between Versailles and Paris had scarcely expired after the departure of Riquet, when the valet again appeared. He brought with him a scrap of paper, which proved to be the back of the Count's own note to Clémence, unsealed, and with no address upon it; but written in a hasty hand within was found —

“ I cannot — I dare not, see you at present, nor can I now write as I should desire to do. If what you wish to say is of immediate importance, write as before, and it is sure to reach me.”

There was no signature, but the hand was that of Clémence de Marly; and the heart of Albert of Morseil felt as if it would have broken. It seemed as if the last tie between him and happiness was severed. It seemed as if that hope, which would have afforded him strength, and support, and energy, to combat every difficulty and overleap every obstacle, was taken away from him; and for five or ten minutes he paced up and down the saloon in agony of mind unutterable.

“ She is yielding already,” he said at length, “ she is yielding already. The King’s commands are hardly announced to her, ere she feels

that she must give way. It is strange—it is most strange ! I could have staked my life that with her it would have been otherwise!—and yet the influence which this Chevalier d'Evran seems always to have possessed over her is equally strange. If, as she has so solemnly told me, she is not really bound to him by any tie of affection, may she not be bound by some promise rashly given in former years? We have heard of such things. However, no promises to me shall stand in the way ; she shall act freely, and at her own will, as far as I am concerned;” and, sitting down, he wrote a few brief lines to Clémence, in which, though he did not pour out the bitterness of his heart, he showed how bitterly he was grieved.

“ The tidings I had to tell you,” he said, “ were simply these, which I heard last night. The King destines your hand for another, and has already announced that such is the case. The few words that you have written show me that you are already aware of this fact, and that perhaps struggling between promises to me and an inclination to obey the royal authority, you are pained, and uncertain how to act. Such, at least, is the belief to which I am led by the few cold painful words which I have received.

If that belief is right, it may make you more easy to know that, in such a case, Albert of Morseiul will never exact the fulfilment of a promise that Clémence de Marly is inclined to break."

He folded the note up, sealed it, and once more called for Riquet. Before the man appeared, however, some degree of hesitation had come over the heart of the Count, and he asked him,—

"Who did you see at the Hôtel de Rouvré?"

"I saw," replied the man, "some of the servants; and I saw two or three ecclesiastics looking after their valises in the court; and I saw Madame de Rouvré looking out of one of the windows with Mademoiselle Clémence, and the Chevalier d'Evran."

"It is enough," said the Count. "I should wish this note taken back to Paris before nightfall, and given into the hands of the same person to whom you gave the other. Take some rest, Riquet. But I should like that to be delivered before nightfall."

"I will deliver it, sir, and be back in time to dress you for the *Appartement*."

"The *appartement*," said the Count, "I had forgotten that, and most likely shall not go. Well," he added after a moment's thought,

“better go there than to the Bastile. But it matters not, Riquet, Jean can dress me.”

The man bowed and retired. But by the time that it was necessary for the Count to commence dressing for the *appartement*, Riquet had returned, bringing with him, however, no answer to the note, for which, indeed, he had not waited. The Count suffered him to arrange his dress as he thought fit, and then proceeded to the palace, which was by this time beginning to be thronged with company.

During one half of the life of Louis XIV. he was accustomed to throw open all the splendid public rooms of his palace three times in the week to all the chief nobility of his court and capital, and every thing that liberal, and even ostentatious, splendour could do to please the eye, delight the ear, or amuse the mind of those who were thus collected, was done by the monarch on the nights which were marked for what was called *appartement*. At an after period of his life, when the death of almost all his great ministers had cast the burden of all the affairs of state upon the King himself, he seldom, if ever, appeared at these assemblies, passing the hours, during which he furnished his

court with amusement, in labouring diligently with one or other of his different ministers.

At the time we speak of, however, he almost every night showed himself in the *appartement* for some time, noticing every body with affability and kindness, and remarking, it was said, accurately who was present and who was not. It was considered a compliment to the monarch never to neglect any reasonable opportunity of paying court at these assemblies ; and it is very certain that had the Count de Morseul failed in presenting himself on the present occasion, his absence would have been regarded as a decided proof of disaffection.

He found the halls below, then, filled with guards and attendants; the staircase covered with officers, and guests arriving in immense crowds ; while from the first room above poured forth the sound of a full orchestra, which was always the first attraction met with during the evening, as if to put the guests in harmony, and prepare their minds for pleasure and enjoyment. The music was of the finest kind that could be found in France, and no person ever rendered himself celebrated, even in any remote province, for peculiar skill or taste in playing on any instrument, without being sought out and brought

to play at the concerts of the King. The concert room, which was the only one where the light was kept subdued, opened into a long suite of apartments, hall beyond hall, saloon beyond saloon, where the eye was dazzled by the blaze, and fatigued by the immense variety of beautiful and precious ornaments which were seen stretching away in brilliant perspective. Here tables were laid out for every sort of game that was then in fashion, from billiards to lansquenet; and the King took especial pains to make it particularly known to every person at his court, that it was not only his wish, but his especial command, if any man found any thing wanting, or required any thing whatever for his amusement or pleasure in the apartments, that he was to order some of the attendants to bring it.

Perfect liberty reigned throughout the whole saloons, as far as was consistent with propriety of conduct. The courtiers made up their parties amongst themselves, chose their own amusements, followed their own pursuits. Every sort of refreshment was provided in abundance, and hundreds on hundreds of servants, in splendid dresses, were seen moving here and there throughout the rooms, supplying the wants,

and fulfilling the wishes of all the guests, with the utmost promptitude, or waiting for their orders, and remarking, with anxious attention, that nothing was wanting to the convenience of any one.

The whole of the principal suite of rooms in the palace was thus thrown open, as we have said, three times in the week, with the exception of the great ball room, which was only opened on particular occasions. Sometimes, at the balls of the court, the *appartement* was not held, and the meeting took place in the ball-room itself. But at other times the ball followed the supper of the King, which took place invariably at ten o'clock, and the company invited proceeded from the *appartement* to the ball-room, leaving those whose age, health, or habits, gave them the privilege of not dancing, to amuse themselves with the games which were provided on the ordinary nights.

Such was to be the case on the present evening, and such as we have described was the scene of splendour which opened upon the eyes of the Count de Morseiul as he entered the concert-room, and taking a seat at the end, gazed up the gallery, listening with pleasure to a calm and somewhat melancholy, but soothing

strain of music. His mind, indeed, was too much occupied with painful feelings of many kinds for him to take any pleasure or great interest in the magnificence spread out before his eyes, which he had indeed often seen before, but which he might have seen again with some admiration, had his bosom been free and his heart at rest.

At present, however, it was but dull pageantry to him, and the music was the thing that pleased him most; but when a gay and lively piece succeeded to that which he had first heard, he rose and walked on into the rooms beyond, striving to find amusement for his thoughts, though pleasure might not be there to be found. Although he was by no means a general frequenter of the Court, and always escaped from it to the calmer pleasures of the country as soon as possible, he was, of course, known to almost all the principal nobility of the realm, and to all the officers who had in any degree distinguished themselves in the service. Thus, in the very first room, he was stopped by a number of acquaintances; and, passing on amidst the buzz of many voices, and all the gay nothings of such a scene, he met from time to time with some one, whose talents, or whose

virtues, or whose greater degree of intimacy with himself, enabled him to pause and enter into longer and more interesting conversation, either in reference to the present — its hopes and fears, — or to the period when last they met, and the events that then surrounded them.

Although such things could not, of course, cure his mind of its melancholy, it afforded him some degree of occupation for his thoughts, till a sudden whisper ran through the rooms of “The King ! The King !” and every body drew back from the centre of the apartments to allow the monarch to pass.

Louis advanced from the inner rooms with that air of stately dignity, which we know, from the accounts both of his friends and enemies, to have been unrivalled in grace and majesty. His commanding person, his handsome features, his kingly carriage, and his slow and measured step, all bespoke at once the monarch, and afforded no bad indication of his character, with its many grand and extensive, if not noble qualities, its capaciousness, its ambition, and even its occasional littleness, for the somewhat theatrical demeanour was never lost, and the stage effect was not less in Louis’s mind than in his person.

He paused to speak for a moment with several persons as he passed, stood at the lansquenet table where his brother and his son were seated, dropped an occasional word, always graceful and agreeable, at two or three of the other tables, and then paused for a moment and looked up and down the rooms, evidently feeling himself, what his whole people believed him to be, the greatest monarch that ever trod the earth. There was something, indeed, it must be acknowledged, in the mighty splendour of the scene around—in the inestimable amount of the earth's treasures there collected—in the blaze of light, the distant sound of the music, the dazzling loveliness of many there present—the courage, the learning, the talent, the genius collected in those halls; and in the knowledge that there was scarcely a man present who would not shed the last drop of his heart's blood in the defence of his King, there was something that might well turn giddy the brain of any man who felt himself placed on that awful pinnacle of power and greatness. Louis, however, was well accustomed to it, and, like the child and the lion, he had become familiar from youth with things which might make other men tremble. Thus he paused but for a moment to

remark and to enjoy, and then advanced again through the apartments.

The next person that his eye fell upon was the Count de Morseiul; and his countenance showed in a moment how true had been the prophecy of the Prince de Marsillac, that a great change would take place in his feelings. He now smiled graciously upon the young Count, and paused to speak with him.

“I trust to see you often here, Monsieur de Morseiul,” he said.

“I shall not fail, Sire,” the Count replied, “to pay my duty to your majesty as often as I am permitted to do so.”

“Then you do not return soon to Poitou, Monsieur le Comte?” said the King.

“I have thought it so improbable that I should do so, Sire,” replied the Count, who evidently saw that Louvois had not failed to report his letter, “that I have taken a hotel here, and have sent for my attendants this day. If I hoped that my presence in Poitou could be of any service to your majesty — ”

“It may be, it may be, Count, in time to come,” replied the King. “In the mean time we will try to amuse you well here. I have heard that you are one of the best billiard-

players in France. Follow me now to the billiard room, and, though I am out of practice, I will try a stroke or two with you."

It was a game in which Louis excelled, as, indeed, he did in all games; and this was one which afterwards, we are told, made the fortune of the famous minister, Chamillart. The Count de Morseiul, therefore, received this invitation as a proof that he was very nearly re-established in the King's good graces. He feared not at all to compete with the monarch, as he himself was also out of practice, and, indeed, far more than the King; so that, though an excellent player, there was no chance of his being driven either to win the game against the monarch, or to make use of some manœuvre to avoid doing so. He followed the King then willingly; but Louis, passing through the billiard-room, went on in the first place to the end of the suite of apartments, noticing every body to whom he wished to pay particular attention, and then returned to the game. A number of persons crowded round—so closely indeed, that the monarch exclaimed,—

" Let us have room—let us have room! We will have none but the ladies so close to us: Ha, Monsieur de Morseiul?"

The game then commenced, and went on with infinite skill and very nearly equal success on both parts. Louis became somewhat eager, but yet a suspicion crossed his mind that the young Count was purposely giving him the advantage, and at the end of some very good strokes he purposely placed his balls in an unfavourable position. The Count did not fail to take instant advantage of the opportunity, and had well nigh won the game. By an unfortunate stroke, however, he lost his advantage, and the King never let him have the table again till he was himself secure.

“ You see, Monsieur de Morseuil,” he said, as he paused for a moment afterwards, “ you see you cannot beat me.”

“ I never even hoped it, Sire,” replied the Count. “ In my own short day I have seen so many kings, generals, and statesmen try to do so with signal want of success, that I never entertained so presumptuous an expectation.”

The monarch smiled graciously, well pleased at a compliment from the young Huguenot nobleman which he had not expected; and as the game was one in which he took great pleasure, and which also displayed the graces of his person to the greatest advantage, he played a

second game with the Count, which he won by only one stroke. He then left the table, and after speaking once more with several persons in the apartments, retired, not to re-appear till after his supper.

As soon as he was gone, the Prince de Marnillac once more approached the young Count, saying in a whisper,— “ You have not beaten the King, Morseiul, but you have conquered him : yet, take my advice, on no account leave the apartments till after the ball has begun. Let Louis see you there, for you know what a marking eye he has for every one who is in the rooms.”

Thus saying, he passed on, and the Count determined to follow his advice, though the hour and a half that was yet to elapse seemed tedious if not interminable to him. About a quarter of an hour before the supper of the King, however, as he sat listlessly leaning against one of the columns, he saw a party coming up from the concert room at a rapid pace, and long before the eye could distinctly see of what persons it was composed, his heart told him that Clémence de Marly was there.

She came forward, leaning on the arm of the Duc de Rouvré, dressed with the utmost splendour, and followed by a party of several others

who had just arrived. She was certainly not less lovely than ever. To the eyes of Albert de Morseuil, indeed, it seemed that she was more so: but there was an expression of deep sadness on that formerly gay and smiling countenance, which would have made the whole feelings of the Count de Morseuil change into grief for her grief, and anxiety for her anxiety, had there not been a certain degree of haughtiness, throned upon her brow and curling her lips, which bespoke more bitterness than depression of feeling. The Duc de Rouvré was, as I have said, proceeding rapidly through the rooms, and paused not to speak with any one. The eyes of Clémence, however, fell full upon the Count de Morseuil, and rested on him with their full melancholy light, while she noticed him with a calm and graceful inclination of the head, but passed on without a word.

The feelings of the Count de Morseuil were bitter indeed, as may well be imagined. "So soon," he said to himself, "so soon! By heaven I can understand now all that I have heard and wondered at: how, for a woman—an empty, vain, coquettish woman—a man may forget the regard of years, and cut his friend's throat as he would that of a stag or boar.

Where is the Chevalier d'Evran I wonder? He does not appear in the train to-night; but perhaps he comes not till the ball. I will wait, however, the same time as if she had not been here."

He moved not from his place, but remained leaning against the column; and, as is generally the case, not seeking, he was sought for. A number of people who knew him gathered round him; and, although he was in any thing but a mood for entertaining or being entertained, the very shortness of his replies, and the degree of melancholy bitterness that mingled with them, caused words that he never intended to be witty, to pass for wit, and protracted the torture of conversing with indifferent people upon indifferent subjects, when the heart is full of bitterness, and the mind occupied with its own sad business.

At length the doors of the ball room were thrown open, and the company poured in to arrange themselves before the monarch came. Several parties, indeed, remained playing at different games at the tables in the gallery, and the Count remained where he was, still leaning against the column, which was at the distance of ten or twelve yards from the doors of the ball

room. Not above five minutes had elapsed before the King and his immediate attendants appeared, coming from his private supper room to be present at the ball. His eye, as he passed, ran over the various tables, making a graceful motion with his hand for the players not to rise; and as he approached the folding doors, he remarked the Count, and beckoned to him to come up. The Count immediately started forward, and the King demanded,

“A gallant young man like you, do you not dance, Monsieur de Morseuil?”

Taken completely by surprise at this piece of condescension, the Count replied,

“Alas, Sire, I am not in spirits to dance; I should but cloud the gaiety of my fair partner, and she would wish herself any where else before the evening were over.”

Louis smiled; and, so much accustomed as he was to attribute the sunshine and clouds upon his courtiers’ brows to the effects of his favour or displeasure, he instantly put his own interpretation upon the words of the Count, and that interpretation raised the young nobleman much in the good graces of a monarch, who, though vain and despotic, was not naturally harsh and severe.”

"If, Monsieur de Morseul," he said, "some slight displeasure which the King expressed yesterday morning, have rendered our gay fellow-soldier of Maestricht and Valenciennes so sad, let his sadness pass away, for his conduct here has effaced unfavourable reports, and if he persevere to the end in the same course, he may count upon the very highest favour."

Almost every circumstance combines on earth to prevent monarchs hearing the truth, even from the most sincere. Time, place, and circumstance is almost always against them; and in the present instance, the Count de Morseul knew well, that neither the spot nor the moment were at all suited to any thing like an explanation. He could but reply, therefore, that the lightest displeasure of the King was of course enough to make him sad, and end his answer by one of those compliments which derive at least half their value, like paper money, from the good will of the receiver.

"Come, come," said the King gaily; "shake off this melancholy, fellow-soldier. Come with me; and if I have rightly heard the secrets of certain hearts, I will find you a partner this night, who shall not wish herself any where else while dancing with the Count de Morseul."

The Count gazed upon the King with utter astonishment; and Louis, enjoying his surprise, led the way quickly on into the ball room, the Count following, as he bade him, close by his side, and amongst his principal officers. As soon as they had entered the ball room, Louis paused for an instant, and every one rose. The King's eyes, as well as those of the Count de Morseil, ran round the vast saloon seeking for some particular object. To Albert of Morseil that object was soon discovered, placed between the Duchess de Rouvré, and Anette de Marville, at the very farthest part of the room. Louis, however, who was in good spirits, and in a mood peculiarly condescending, walked round the whole circle, pausing to speak to almost every married lady there, and twice turning suddenly towards the Count, perhaps with the purpose of teasing him a little, but seemingly as if about to point out the lady to whom he had alluded. At length, however, he reached the spot where the Duchess de Rouvré and her party were placed; and after speaking for a moment to the Duchess, while the cheek of Clémence de Marly became deadly pale and then glowed again fiery red, he turned suddenly towards her, and said —

“ Mademoiselle de Marly, or perhaps as I in gallantry ought to say, *Belle Clémence*, I have promised the Count de Morseul here to find him a partner for this ball, who will dance with him throughout to-night, without wishing herself anywhere else. Now, as I have certain information that he is very hateful to you, there is but one thing which can make you execute the task to the full. Doubtless you, as well as all the rest of our court, feel nothing so great a pleasure as obeying the King’s commands — at least, so they tell me — and therefore I command you to dance with him, and to be as happy as possible, and not to wish yourself any where else from this moment till the ball closes.”

He waited for no reply, but making a sign to the Count to remain by the side of his fair partner, proceeded round the rest of the circle. Nothing in the demeanour of Clémence de Marly but her varying colour had told how much she was agitated while the King spoke; but the words which the monarch had used were so pointed, and touched so directly upon the feelings between herself and Albert of Morseul, that those who stood around pressed slightly forward as soon as Louis had gone on, to see how she was affected by what had passed. To

her ear those words were most strange and extraordinary. It was evident that by some one the secret of her heart had been betrayed to the King, and equally evident that Louis had determined to countenance that love which she had fancied would make her happy in poverty, danger, or distress, announcing his approbation at the very moment that a temporary coldness had arisen between her and her lover, and that her heart was oppressed with those feelings of hopelessness, which will sometimes cross even our brightest and happiest days.

On the Count de Morseuil the King's words had produced a different, but not a less powerful effect. The surprise and joy which he might have felt at finding himself suddenly pointed out by the monarch as the favoured suitor for the hand of her he loved, was well nigh done away by the conviction that the price the King put upon his ultimate approbation of their union was such as he could not pay. But nevertheless those words were most joyful, though they raised up some feeling of self-reproach in his heart. It was evident that the tale told by Pelisson regarding the Chevalier was false, or perhaps, indeed, originated in some pious fraud devised for the purpose of

driving him more speedily to acknowledge himself a convert to the church of Rome. Whatever were the circumstances, however, it was clear that Clémence was herself unconscious of any such report, and that all the probabilities which imagination had built up to torment him were but idle dreams. He had pained himself enough indeed; but he had pained Clémence also, and his first wish was to offer her any atonement in his power.

Such were the feelings and thoughts called up in the bosom of the young Count by the events which had just occurred. But the surprise of Clémence and her lover was far outdone by that of the Duke and Duchess de Rouvré, who, astonished at the favour into which their young friend seemed so suddenly to have risen, and equally astonished at the intimation given by the King of an attachment existing between the Count and Clémence, overflowed with joy and satisfaction as soon as the monarch left the spot, and expressed many a vain hope that, after all, the affairs which had commenced in darkness and shadow, would end in sunshine and light. Ere the Count could reply, or say one word to Clémence de Marly, the *bransle* began, and he led her forth to dance. There was but a mo-

ment for him to speak to her; but he did not lose that moment.

“ Clémence,” he said, as he led her forward, “ I fear I have both pained you and wronged you.”

A bright and beautiful smile spread at once over her countenance. “ You have,” she said; “ but those words are enough, Albert! Say no more! the pain is done away; the wrong is forgotten.”

“ It is not forgotten by me, sweet girl,” he replied, in the same low tone; “ but I must speak to you long, and explain all.”

“ Come to-morrow,” she answered; “ all difficulties must now be done away. I, too, have something to explain, Albert,” she added, “ but yet not every thing that I could wish to explain, and about that I will make you my only reproach. You promised not to doubt me — oh, keep that promise!”

As she spoke the dance began, and of course their conversation for the time concluded. All eyes were upon the young Count — so rare a visiter at the palace, and upon her — so admired, so courted, so disdainful, as she was believed to be by every one present, but whose destiny seemed now decided, and whose heart

every one naturally believed to be won. Graceful by nature as well as by education, no two persons of the whole court could have been better fitted than Albert of Morseil and Clémence de Marly to pass through the ordeal of such a scene as a court ball in those days; and though every eye was, as we have said, upon them, yet they had a great advantage on that night, which would have prevented any thing like embarrassment, even had not such scenes been quite familiar to them. They scarcely knew that any eyes were watching them, they were scarcely conscious of the presence of the glittering crowd around. Engrossed by their own individual feelings — deep, absorbing, overpowering, as those feelings were,—their spirits were wrapt up in themselves and in each other; they thought not of the dance, they thought not of the spectators, but left habit, and natural grace, and a fine ear, to do all that was requisite as far as the minuet was concerned. If either thought of the dance at all, it was only when the eyes of Albert of Morseil rested on Clémence, and he thought her certainly more lovely and graceful than ever she had before appeared, or when his hand touched hers, and the thrill of that touch passed to his heart,

speaking of love and hope and happiness to come. The effect was what might naturally be supposed — each danced more gracefully than perhaps they had ever done before; and one of those slight murmurs of admiration passed through the courtly crowd, and was confirmed by a gracious smile and gentle inclination of the head from the King himself.

“ We must not let him escape us,” said the monarch in a low voice to the Prince de Marsillac. “ Certainly he is worthy of some trouble in recalling from his errors.”

“ If he escape from the fair net your majesty has spread for him,” replied the Prince, “ he will be the most cunning bird that ever I saw. Indeed, I should suppose he has no choice, when, if caught, he will have to thank his King for every thing, for honour, favour, distinction, his soul’s salvation, and a fair wife that loves him. If he be not pressed till he takes fright, he will entangle himself so that no power can extricate him.”

“ He shall have every opportunity,” said the King. “ I must not appear too much in the matter. You, Prince, see that they be left alone together, if possible, for a few minutes.

Use what manœuvre you will, and I will take care to countenance it."

At the court balls of that day it was the custom to dance throughout the night with one person, and the opportunity of conversing between those who were dancing was very small. A few brief words at the commencement, or at the end of each dance, was all that could be hoped for, and Clémence and her lover were fain to fix all their hopes of explanation and of longer intercourse upon the morrow. Suddenly, however, it was announced, before the hour at which the balls usually terminated, that the King had a lottery, to which all the married ladies of the court were invited.

The crowd poured into the apartment where the drawing of this lottery was to take place ; every lady anxious for a ticket where all were prizes, and the tickets themselves given by the King ; while those who were not to share in this splendid piece of generosity, were little less eager, desirous of seeing the prizes, and learning who it was that won them. All then, as we have said, poured out of the ball room, through the great gallery and other state-rooms in which the *appartement* was usually held.

There were only two who lingered — Clé-

mence de Marly and Albert of Morseuil. They, however, remained to the last, and then followed slowly, employing the few minutes thus obtained in low spoken words of affection, perhaps all the warmer and all the tenderer for the coldness and the pain just passed. Ere three sentences, however, had been uttered, the good Duc de Rouvré approached, saying, “Come, Clémence, come quick, or you will not find a place where you will see.”

The eye of the Prince de Marsillac, however, was upon them ; and, threading the mazes of the crowd, he took the Duke by the arm ; and, drawing him aside with an important face, told him that the King wanted to speak with him immediately. The Duc de Rouvré darted quickly away to seek the monarch : and the Prince paused for a single instant ere he followed, to say in a low voice to the Count,—

“ You will neither of you be required at the lottery, if you think that the lot you have drawn already is sufficiently good.”

The Count was not slow to understand the hint, and he gently led Clémence de Marly back into one of the vacant saloons.

“ Surely they will think it strange,” she said ; but ere the Count could reply, she added

quickly ; “ but, after all, what matters it if they do ? — I would have it so, that every one may see and know the whole so clearly, that all persecution may be at an end. Now, Albert, now,” she said, “ tell me what could make you write me so cruel a letter.”

“ I will in one word,” he replied ; “ but remember, Clémence, that I own I have been wrong, and in telling you the causes, in explaining the various circumstances which led me to believe that you were wavering in your engagements to me, I seek not to justify myself, but merely to explain.”

“ Oh never, never think it !” she exclaimed, ere she would let him go on ; “ whatever may happen, whatever appearances may be, never, Albert, never for one moment think that I am wavering ! Once more, most solemnly, most truly, I assure you, that though perhaps fate may separate me from you, and circumstances over which we have no control render our union impossible, nothing — no, not the prospect of immediate death itself, shall ever induce me to give my hand to another. No circumstances can effect that, for that must be my voluntary act ; and I can endure death, I can endure imprisonment, I can endure any thing

they choose to inflict, except the wedding a man I do not love. Now, tell me," she continued, "now let me hear, what could make you think I did so waver."

The Count related all that had taken place, the words which he had heard Pelisson make use of in conversation with an indifferent person, the mortification and pain he had felt at the words she had written in answer to his note, the confirmation of all his anxious fears by what Jerome Riquet had told him, and all the other probabilities that had arisen to make him believe that those fears were just.

Clémence heard him sometimes with a look of pain, sometimes with a reproachful smile. "After all, Albert," she said, "perhaps you have had some cause—more cause indeed than jealous men often have, and yet you shall hear how simply all this may be accounted for. The day after we parted in Poitou, the Abbé de St. Helie arrived at Ruffigny, with several other persons of the same kind, and Monsieur de Rouvré found his house filled with spies upon his actions. He received, however, in the evening of the same day, an order to come to the court immediately, to give an account of the events which had taken place in his government.

The same spies of Louvois accompanied us on the road, as well as the Chevalier d'Evran,— who was the person that had obtained from the King the order for the Duke to appear at court, rather than to remain in exile at Ruffigny, while his enemies said what they chose of him in his absence. We had not arrived in Paris ten minutes at the time your servant came. We were surrounded by spies of every kind; the good Duke was in a state of agitation impossible to describe, and so fearful that any thing like a Protestant should be seen in his house, or that any thing, in short, should occur to give probability to the charges against him, that I knew your coming would be dangerous both to yourself and to him, the house being filled with persons who were ready not only to report, but to pervert every thing that took place. On receiving your note, Maria called me out of the saloon ; but my apartments were not prepared ; servants were coming and going ; no writing paper was to be procured ; a pen and ink was obtained with difficulty. I knew if I were absent five minutes in the state of agitation that pervaded the whole household, Madame de Rouvré would come to seek me, and I was consequently obliged to write the few words I

did write in the greatest haste, and under the greatest anxiety. Maria was not even out of the room conveying those few words to your servant, when the Duchess came in, and I was glad hypocritically to affect great activity and neatness about the arrangement of my apartments, to conceal the real matter which had employed me. Such is the simple state of the case; and I never even heard of this other marriage, about which Pelisson must have made some mistake. Had I heard of it," she added, "it would only have made me laugh."

"I see not why it should do so," replied the Count. "Surely, Louis d'Evran is — as I well know he is considered by many of the fair and the bright about this court—a person not to be despised by any woman. He evidently, too, exercises great influence over you, Clémence; and therefore the report itself was not such as I, at least, could treat as absurd, especially when, in addition to these facts, it was stated that the King had expressed his will that you should give him your hand."

"To me, however, Albert," she replied, "it must appear absurd, knowing and feeling as I do know and feel, that were the Chevalier d'Evran the only man I had ever seen, or ever were likely to see, that I should never even

dream of marrying him. He may be much loved and liked by other women; doubtless he is, and sure I am he well deserves it. I like him, too, Albert. I scruple not to own it—I like him much; but that is very different from loving him as I love—as a woman should love her husband I mean to say. And now, Albert," she continued, "with regard to the influence he has over me, I will tell you nothing more. That shall remain as a trial of your confidence in me. This influence will never be exerted but when it is right. Should it be exerted wrongly, it is at an end from that moment. When you wished to accompany me to Ruffigny, from that terrible scene in which we last parted, he represented to me in few words how Monsieur de Rouvré was situated. He showed me, that by bringing you there at such a time from such a scene, I should but bring destruction on that kind friend who had sheltered and protected my infancy and my youth, when I had none else to protect me. He showed me, too, that I should put an impassable barrier between you and me, for the time at least. He told me that no one but himself was aware of where I was, but that your accompanying me would instantly make it known to the whole world, and most likely produce the

ruin of both. Now, tell me, Albert, was he not right to say all this? Was not his view a just one?"

" It was," replied the Count; " but yet he might have urged it in another manner. He might have explained the whole to me as well as to you : and still you leave unexplained, Clémence, how he should know where you were when you had concealed it so well, so unaccountably well, from the family at Ruffigny."

" Oh ! jealousy, jealousy," said Clémence, playfully ; " what a terrible and extraordinary thing jealousy is ! and yet, Albert, perhaps a woman likes to see a little of it when she really loves. However, you are somewhat too hard upon the Chevalier, and you shall not wring from me any other secret just yet. You have wrung from me, Albert, too many of the secrets of my heart already, and I will not make you the spoilt child of love, by letting you have altogether your own way. As to my concealing from the family of Ruffigny, however, where I was going on that occasion, or on most others, it is very easily explained. Do you not know that till I was foolish enough at Poitiers to barter all the freedom of my heart, for love with but little confidence it would seem, I have

always been a tyrant instead of a slave? Are you not aware that I have always done just as I liked with every one? and one of my reasons for exercising my power to the most extreme degree was, that my religious faith might never be controlled? Till this fierce persecution of the Protestants began, and till the King made it his great object, and announced his determination of putting down all but the Roman Catholic faith in the realm, Monsieur de Rouvré himself cared but little for the distinction of Protestant and Catholic, and even had he known what I was doing, though he might have objected, would not have strongly opposed me. I established my right, however, of doing what I liked, and going where I liked, and acting as I liked, on such firm grounds, that it was not easily shaken. Even now, had I chosen to see you to-day in Paris, I might have done it; but would you have thought the better of Clémence if she had risked the fortunes of him who has been more than a father to her? Nobody would, and nobody should have said me nay, if I had believed that it was just and right to bid you come. But I thought it was wrong, Albert. Now, however, I may bid you come in safety to all; and now that I have time and opportunity to

make any arrangements I like, I may safely promise, that should any change come over the present aspect of our affairs, which change I fear must and will come, I will find means to see you at any time, and under any circumstances. But hark ! from what I hear, the lottery is over, and the people departing. Let us go forward and join them, if it be but for a moment."

Thus saying, she rose, and the Count led her on to the room where the distribution of the prizes had just taken place. Every one was now interested with another subject. A full hour had been given at the beginning of the evening to the affair of the Count de Morseul and Mademoiselle de Marly, which was a far greater space of time, and far more attention than such a court might be expected to give, even to matters of the deepest and most vital importance. But no former impression could of course outlive the effect of a lottery. There was not one man or woman present whose thoughts were filled with any thing else than the prizes and their distributions ; and the head of even the good Duchess of Rouvré herself, who was certainly of somewhat higher character than most of those present, was so filled with the grand engrossing theme, that nothing was talked

of, as the party returned to Paris, but the prize which had fallen to the share of Madame de This, or the disappointment which had been met with by Madame de That; so that Clémence de Marly could lean back in the dark corner of the carriage, and enjoy her silence undisturbed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUR OF HAPPINESS.

At the levée of the King, on the succeeding morning, the young Count de Morseul was permitted to appear for a few minutes. The monarch was evidently in haste, having somewhat broken in on his matutinal habits in consequence of the late hour at which he had retired on the night before.

“They tell me you have a favour to ask, Monsieur de Morseul,” said the King. “I hope it is not a very great one, for I have slept so well and am in such haste, that, perhaps, I might grant it, whether it were right or wrong.”

“It is merely, Sire,” replied the Count, “to ask your gracious permission to proceed to Paris this morning, in order to visit Mademoiselle de Marly. Not knowing when it may be your royal pleasure to grant me the longer audience which you promised for some future

time, I did not choose to absent myself from Versailles without your majesty's consent."

Louis smiled graciously, for no such tokens of deference were lost upon him. "Most assuredly," he said, "you have my full permission: and now I think of it—Bontems," he continued, turning to one of his *valets de chambre*, "bring me that casket that is in the little cabinet below — now I think of it, the number of our ladies last night fell short at the lottery, and there was a prize of a pair of diamond ear-rings left. I had intended to have given them to La belle Clémence; but, somehow," he added, with a smile, "she did not appear in the room. Perhaps, however, you know more of that than I do, Monsieur de Morseul! — Oh, here is Bontems — give me the casket."

Taking out of the small ebony box which was now presented to him, a little case, containing a very handsome pair of diamond ear-rings, the King placed it in the hands of the young Count, saying, "There, Monsieur de Morseul, be my messenger to the fair lady. Give her those jewels from the King; and tell her, that I hope ere long she will be qualified to draw prizes in some not very distant lottery by appearing as one of the married ladies of our

court. She has tortured all our gallant gentlemen's hearts too long, and we will not suffer our subjects to be thus ill treated. Do you stay in Paris all day, Monseigneur de Morseuil, or do you come here to witness the new opera?"

"I did not propose to do either, Sire," replied the Count: "I had, in fact, engaged myself to pass another pleasant evening at the house of Monsieur de Meaux."

"Indeed!" said the King, evidently well pleased. "That is all as it should be. I cannot but think, Monsieur de Morseuil, that if you pass many more evenings so well, either you will convert Monsieur de Meaux — which God forbid, or Monsieur de Meaux will convert you — which God grant."

The Count bowed gravely; and, as the King turned to speak with some one else who was giving him a part of his dress, the young nobleman took it as a permission to retire; and, mounting his horse, which had been kept ready saddled, he made the best of his way towards the capital.

That gay world, with its continual motion, was as animated then as now. Though the abode of the court was at Versailles, yet the

distance was too small to make the portion of the population absolutely withdrawn from the metropolis at all important while all the other great bodies of the kingdom assembled, or were represented there. Thousands on thousands were hurrying through the streets; the same trades and occupations were going on then as now, with only this difference, that, at that period, luxury, and industry, and every productive art had reached, if not its highest, at least its most flourishing point; and all things presented, even down to the aspect of the city itself, that hollow splendour, that tinselled magnificence, that artificial excitement, that insecure prosperity, the falseness of all and each of which had afterwards to be proved, and which entailed a long period of fresh errors, bitter repentance, and terrible atonement.

But through the gay crowd the Count de Morseil passed on, noticing it little, if at all. He was urged on his way by the strongest of all human impulses, by love—first, ardent, pure, sincere, love—all the more deep, all the more intense, all the more over-powering, because he had not felt it at that earlier period, while the animal triumphs over the mental in almost all the affections of man. His heart

and his spirit had lost nothing of their freshness to counterbalance the vigour and the power they had obtained, and at the age of seven or eight and twenty he loved with all the vehemence and ardour of a boy, while he felt with all the permanence and energy of manhood.

Though contrary, perhaps, to the rules and etiquettes of French life at that period, he took advantage both of the message with which he was charged from the King, and the sort of independence which Clémence de Marly had established for herself, to ask for her instead of either the Duke or the Duchess. He was not, indeed, without a hope that he should find her alone, and that hope was realised. She had expected him, and expected him early ; and, perhaps, the good Duchess de Rouvré herself had fancied that such might be the case, and, remembering the warm affections of her own days, had abstained from presenting herself in the little saloon where Clémence de Marly had usually established her abode during their residence in Paris.

Had Albert of Morseuil entertained one doubt of the affection of Clémence de Marly, that doubt must have vanished in a moment — must have

vanished at the look with which she rose to meet him. It was all brightness — it was all happiness. The blood mounted, it is true, into her cheeks, and into her temples; her beautiful lips trembled slightly, and her breath came fast; but the bright and radiant smile was not to be mistaken. The sparkling of the eyes spoke what words could not speak; and, though her tongue for a moment refused its office, the smile that played around the lips was eloquent of all that the heart felt.

Not contented with the hand she gave, Albert of Morseiul took the other also; and not contented with the thrilling touch of those small hands, he threw his arms around her, and pressed her to his heart; and not contented — for love is the greatest of encroachers — with that dear embrace, he made his lips tell the tale of their own joy to hers, and once and again he tasted the happiness that none had ever tasted before: and then, as if asking pardon for the rashness of his love, he pressed another kiss upon her fair hand, and leading her back to her seat, took his place beside her.

Fearful that he should forget, he almost immediately gave her the jewels that the King had sent. But what were jewels to Clémence

de Marly at that moment? He told her, also, the message the King had given, especially that part which noted her absence from the room where the lottery had been drawn.

“I would not have given those ten minutes,” she replied eagerly, “for all the jewels in his crown.”

They then forgot the King, the court, and every thing but each other, and spent the moments of the next half hour in the joy, in the surpassing joy, of telling and feeling the happiness that each conferred upon the other.

Oh! those bright sunny hours of early love, of love in its purity and its truth, and its sincerity — of love, stripped of all that is evil, or low, or corrupt, and retaining but of earth sufficient to make it harmonise with earthly creatures like ourselves — full of affection — full of eager fire, but affection as unselfish as human nature will admit, and fire derived from heaven itself! How shall ye ever be replaced in after life? What tone shall ever supply the sound of that master chord after its vibrations have once ceased?

As the time wore on, however, and Albert of Morseuil remembered that there were many things on which it was necessary to speak at once to Clémence de Marly, the slight cloud of

care came back upon his brow, and reading the sign of thought in a moment, she herself led the way, by saying,—

“ But we must not forget, dear Albert, there is much to be thought of. We are spending our time in dreaming over our love, when we have to think of many more painful points in our situation. We have spoken of all that concerns our intercourse with each other; but of your situation at the court I am ignorant; and am not only ignorant of the cause, but astonished to find, that when I expected the most disastrous results, you are in high favour with the King, and apparently have all at your command.”

“ Not so, dear Clémence — alas ! it is not so,” replied the Count; “ the prosperity of my situation is as hollow as a courtier’s heart — as fickle as any of the other smiles of fortune.”

Before he could go on, however, to explain to her the real position in which he stood, Madame de Rouvré entered the room, and was delighted at seeing one whom she had always esteemed and loved. She might have remained long, but Clémence, with the manner which she was so much accustomed to assume, half playful, half peremptory, took up the little case of ear-rings from the table, saying, “ See what the

King has sent me! and now, dear Duchess, you shall go away, and leave me to talk with my lover. It is so new a thing for me to have an acknowledged lover, and one, too, that I don't despise, that I have not half tired myself with my new plaything. Am not I a very saucy demoiselle?" she added, kissing the Duchess, who was retiring with laughing obedience. " But take the diamonds, and examine them at your leisure. They will serve to amuse you in the absence of your Clémence."

" If I were a lover now," said the Duchess smiling, " I should say something about their not being half as bright as your eyes, Clémence. But words vary in their value so much, that what would be very smart and pleasant from a young man, is altogether worthless on the lips of an old woman. Let me see you before you go, Count. It is not fair that saucy girl should carry you off altogether."

" Now, now, Albert," said Clémence, as soon as the Duchess was gone, " tell me before we are interrupted again."

The Count took up the tale then with his last day's sojourn in Brittany, and went on to detail minutely every thing that had occurred since his arrival in the capital; and, as he told

her, her cheek grew somewhat paler till, in the end, she exclaimed, “It is all as bad as it can be. You will never change your faith, Albert.”

“Could you love me, Clémence,” he asked, “if I did?”

She put her hand before her eyes for a moment, then placed one of them in his, and replied, “I should love you ever, Albert, with a woman’s love, unchangeable and fixed. But I could not esteem you, as I would fain esteem him that I must love.”

“So thought I,” replied the Count, “so judged I of my Clémence; and all that now remains to be thought of is, how is this to end, and what is to be our conduct to make the end as happy to ourselves as may be?”

“Alas!” replied Clémence, “I can answer neither question. The probability is that all must end badly, that your determination not to yield your religion to any inducements must soon be known; for depend upon it, Albert, they will press you on the subject more closely every day; and you are not made to conceal what you feel. The greater the expectations of your conversion have been, the more terrible will be the anger that your adherence

to your own faith will produce ; and depend upon it, the Prince de Marsillac takes a wrong view of the question ; for it matters not whether this affair have passed away, or be revived against you,—power never yet wanted a pretext to draw the sword of persecution. Neither, Albert, can my change of faith be long concealed. I cannot insult God by the mockery of faith in things, regarding which my mind was long doubtful, but which I am now well assured, and thoroughly convinced, are false. In this you are in a better situation than myself, for you can but be accused of holding fast to the faith that you have ever professed : me they will accuse of falling into heresy with my eyes open. Perhaps they will add that I have done so for your love.”

“ Then, dear Clémence,” he replied, “ the only path for us is the path of flight, speedy and rapid flight. I have already secured for us competence in another land ; wealth I cannot secure, but competence is surely all that either you or I require.”

“ All, all,” replied Clémence ; “ poverty with you, Albert, would be enough. But the time, and the manner of our flight, must be left to you. The distance between Paris and the fron-

tier is so small, that we had better effect it now, and not wait for any contingency. If you can find means to withdraw yourself from the court, I will find means to join you any where within two or three miles' journey of the capital. But write to me the place, the hour, and the time; and, as we love each other, Albert, and by the faith that we both hold, and for which we are both prepared to sacrifice so much, I will not fail you."

"What if it should be to-morrow?" demanded the Count.

Clémence gazed at him for a moment with some agitation. "Even if it should be to-morrow," she said at length, "even if it should be to-morrow, I will come. But oh, Albert," she added, leaning her head upon his shoulder, "I am weaker, more cowardly, more womanly than I thought. I would fain have it a day later: I would fain procrastinate even by a day. But never mind, never mind, Albert; should it be necessary, should you judge it right, should you think it requisite for your safety, let it be to-morrow."

"I cannot yet judge," replied the Count; "I think, I trust that it will not be so soon. I only put the question to make you aware that

such a thing is possible, barely possible. In all probability the King will give me longer time. He cannot suppose that the work of conversion will take place by a miracle. I do not wish to play a double game with them, even in the least, Clémence, nor suffer them to believe that there is a chance even of my changing, when there is none; but still I would fain, for your sake as well as mine, delay a day or two."

"Delays are dangerous, even to an old proverb," said Clémence; but ere she could conclude her sentence the Duc de Rouvré entered the room; and not choosing, or perhaps not having spirits at the moment to act towards him as she had done towards the Duchess, Clemence suffered the conversation to drop, and proceeded with him and her lover to the saloon of Madame.

In that saloon there appeared a number of persons, amongst whom were several that the Count de Morseil knew slightly; but the beams of royal favour having fallen upon him with their full light during the night before, all those who had any knowledge of him were of course eager to improve such an acquaintance, and vied with each other in smiles and looks of pleasure on his appearance. Amongst others

was the Chevalier de Rohan, whom we have noticed as forming one of the train of suitors who had followed Clémence de Marly to Poitiers; but he was now satisfied, apparently, that not even any fortunate accident could give the bright prize to him, and he merely bowed to her on her entrance, with the air of a worshipper at the shrine of an idol, while he grasped the hand of his successful rival, and declared himself delighted to see him.

After remaining there for some time longer lingering in the sunshine of the looks of her he loved, the Count prepared to take his departure, especially as several other persons had been added to the circle, and their society fell as a weight and an incumbrance upon him when his whole thoughts were of Clémence de Marly. He had taken his leave and reached the door of the apartment, when, starting up with the ear-rings in her hand, she exclaimed —

“ Stay, stay, Monsieur de Morseul, I forgot to send my thanks to the King. Pray tell him,” she added, advancing across the room to speak with the Count in a lower tone, “ Pray tell him how grateful I am to his Majesty for his kind remembrance; and remember,” she said, in a voice that could be heard by no one but him-

self, “to-morrow, should it be needful: — I am firmer now.”

Albert of Morseil dared not speak all that he felt, with the language of the lips; but the eyes of her lover thanked Clémence de Marly sufficiently: and he, on his part, left her with feelings which the bustle and the crowd of the thronged capital struggled with and oppressed.

He rode quick, then, in order to make his way out of the city as fast as possible; but ere he had passed the gate, he was overtaken by the Chevalier de Rohan, who came up to his side, saying, “I am delighted to have overtaken you, my dear Count. Such a companion on this long dry tiresome journey to Versailles is, indeed, a delight; and I wished also particularly to speak to you regarding a scheme of mine, which, I trust, may bring me better days.”

Now, the society of the Chevalier de Rohan, though his family was one of the highest in France, and though he held an important place at the court, was neither very agreeable nor very reputable; and the Count, therefore, replied briefly, “I fear that, as I shall stop at several places, it will not be in my power to accompany you, Monsieur le Chevalier; but

any thing I can do to serve you will give me pleasure."

"Why, the fact is," replied the Chevalier, "that I was very unfortunate last night at play, and wished to ask if you would lend me a small sum till I receive my appointments from the King. If you are kind enough to do so, I doubt not before two days are over to recover all that I have lost, and ten times more, for I discovered the fortunate number last night when it was too late."

A faint and melancholy smile came over the Count's face, at the picture of human weakness that his companion's words displayed; and as the Chevalier was somewhat celebrated for borrowing without repaying, he asked what was the sum he required."

"Oh, a hundred Louis will be quite enough," replied the Chevalier, not encouraged to ask more by his companion's tone.

"Well, Monsieur de Rohan," said the Count, "I have not the sum with me, but I will send it to you on my arrival at Versailles, if that will be time enough."

"Quite! quite!" replied de Rohan; "any time before the tables are open."

"Indeed, indeed! my good friend," said

the Count, “ I wish you would abandon such fatal habits ; and, satisfied with having lost so much, live upon the income you have, without ruining yourself by trying to make it greater. However, I will send the money, and do with it what you will.”

“ You are a prude ! you are a prude ! ” cried De Rohan, putting spurs to his horse ; “ but I will tell you something more in your own way when we meet again.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNKNOWN PERIL.

DARK and ominous as was the prospect of every thing around the Count de Morseuil, when the blessings of his bright days were passing away, one by one, and his best hope was exile, yet the interview which had just taken place between him and Clémence de Marly was like a bright summer hour in the midst of storms, and even when it was over, like the June sun, it left a long twilight of remembered joy behind it. But there are times in human life when dangers are manifold, when we are pressed upon by a thousand difficulties, and when, nevertheless, though the course we have determined on is full of risks and perils, sorrows and sufferings, we eagerly, perhaps even imprudently, hurry forward upon it, to avoid those very doubts and uncertainties, which are worse than actual pains.

Such was the case with the Count de Morseuil, and he felt within him so strong an inclination to take the irrevocable step of quitting France

for ever, and seeking peace and toleration in another land, that, much accustomed to examine and govern his own feelings, he paused, and pondered over the line of conduct he was about to pursue, during his visit to the Bishop of Meaux, perceiving in himself a half concealed purpose of forcing on the conversation to the subject of religion, and of showing Bossuet clearly, that there was no chance whatever of inducing him to abandon the religion of his fathers. Against this inclination, on reflection, he determined to be upon his guard, although he adhered rigidly to his resolution of countenancing, in no degree, a hope of his becoming a convert to the Roman Catholic faith ; and his only doubt now was whether his passing two evenings so close together with the Bishop of Meaux, with whom he had so slight an acquaintance, might not afford some encouragement to expectations which he felt himself bound to check.

Having promised, however, he went, but at the same time made up his mind not to return to the prelate's abode speedily. On the present occasion, he not only found Bossuet alone, but was left with him for more than an hour, without any other visiter appearing. The good Bishop

himself was well aware of the danger of scaring away those whom he sought to win; and, sincerely desirous, for the Count's own sake, of bringing him into that which he believed to be the only path to salvation, he was inclined to proceed calmly and gently in the work of his conversion.

There were others, however, more eager than himself; the King was as impetuous in the apostolic zeal which he believed himself to feel, as he had formerly been in pursuits which though, certainly more gross and sensual, would perhaps, if accurately weighed, have been found to be as little selfish, vain, and personal, as the efforts that he made to convert his Protestant subjects. The hesitation even in regard to embracing the *King's creed* was an offence, and he urged on Bossuet eagerly to press the young Count, so far, at least, as to ascertain if there were or were not a prospect of his speedily following the example of Turenne, and so many others. The Bishop was thus driven to the subject, though against his will; and shortly after the young Count's appearance, he took him kindly and mildly by the hand, and led him into a small cabinet, where were ranged, in goodly order, a considerable number of works on the controversial divinity of the time. Amongst others,

appeared some of the good prelate's own productions, such as “*L'Exposition de la Doctrine Catholique*,” the “*Traité de la Communion sous les deux Espèces*,” and the “*Histoire des Variations*.” Bossuet ran his finger over the titles as he pointed them out to the young Count.

“ I wish, my young friend,” he said, “ that I could prevail upon you to read some of these works: some perhaps even of my own, not from the vanity of an author alone, though I believe that the greatest compliment that has ever been paid to me was that which was paid by some of the pastors of your own sect, who asserted when I wrote that book,” and he pointed to the *Exposition*, “ that I had altered the Catholic doctrines in order to suit them to the purposes of my defence. Nor indeed would they admit the contrary, till the full approbation of the head of our church stamped the work as containing the true doctrines of our holy faith. But, as I was saying, I wish I could persuade you to read some of these, not so much to gratify the vanity of an author, nor even simply to make a convert, but because I look upon you as one well worthy of saving, as a brand from the burning — and because I should look upon your recall to the bosom of the mother church as worth

a hundred of any ordinary conversions. In short, my dear young friend, because I would save you from much unhappiness, in life, in death, and in eternity."

"I owe you deep thanks, Monsieur de Meaux," said the Count, "for the interest that you take in me; and I will promise you most sincerely to read, with as unprejudiced an eye as possible, not only any but all of the works you have written on such subjects. I have already read some, and it is by no means too much to admit, that if any one could induce me to quit the faith in which I have been brought up, it would be Monsieur de Meaux. He will not think me wrong, however, when I say that I am, as yet, unconvinced. Nor will he be offended if I make one observation, or, rather, ask one question, in regard to something he has just said."

"Far, far from it, my son," replied the Bishop. "I am ever willing to explain any thing, to enter into the most open and candid exposition of every thing that I think or feel. I have no design to embarrass, or to perplex, or to obscure; my whole view is to make my own doctrine clear and explicit, so that the mind of the merest child may choose between the right and the wrong."

"I merely wish to ask," said the Count, "whether by the words 'unhappiness in life, and in death,' you meant to allude to temporal or spiritual unhappiness? whether you meant delicately to point out to me that the hand of persecution is likely to be stretched out to oppress me? or ——"

"No! no!" cried Bossuet, eagerly. "Heaven forbid that I should hold out as an inducement the apprehension of things that I disapprove of! No, Monsieur de Morseul, I meant merely spiritual happiness and unhappiness, for I do not believe that any man can be perfectly happy in life while persisting in a wrong belief; certainly I believe that he must be unhappy in his death; and, alas! my son, reason and religion both teach me that he must be unhappy in eternity."

"The great question of eternity," replied the Count, solemnly, "is in the hands of God. But the man, and the only man, who, in this sense, must be unhappy in life, in death, and in eternity, seems to me to be the man who is uncertain in his faith. In life and in death I can conceive the deist, or (if there be such a thing) the atheist—if perfectly convinced of the truth of his system — perfectly happy and perfectly

contented. But the sceptic can never be happy. He who, in regard to religious belief, is doubtful, uncertain, wavering, must assuredly be unhappy in life and in death, though to God's great mercy we must refer the eternity. If I remain unshaken, Monsieur de Meaux, in my firm belief that what we call the reformed church is right in its views and doctrines, the only thing that can disturb or make me unhappy therein is temporal persecution. Were my faith in that church, however, shaken, I would abandon it immediately. I could not, I would not, remain in a state of doubt."

"The more anxious am I, my son," replied the Bishop, "to withdraw you from that erroneous creed, for so firm and so decided a mind as yours is the very one which could the best appreciate the doctrines of the church of Rome, which are always clear, definite, and precise, the same to-day as they were yesterday, based upon decisions that never change, and not, as your faith does, admitting doubts and fostering variations. You must listen to me, my young friend. Indeed, I must have you listen to me. I hear some of our other friends in the next room; but we must converse more, and the sooner the better. You have visited me twice,

but I will next visit you, for I think nothing should be left undone that may court a noble spirit back to the church of God."

Thus saying, he slowly led the way into the larger room, the young Count merely replying as he did so, —

"Would to God, Monsieur de Meaux, that by your example and by your exhortations you could prevent others from giving us Protestants the strongest of all temporal motives to remain attached to our own creed."

"What motive is that?" demanded Bossuet, apparently in some surprise.

"Persecution!" replied the Count; "for depend upon it, to all those who are worthy of being gained, persecution is the strongest motive of resistance."

"Alas! my son," replied Bossuet, "that you should acknowledge such a thing as pride to have any thing on earth to do with the eternal salvation of your souls. An old friend of mine used to say, 'It is more often from pride than from want of judgment that people set themselves up against established opinions. Men find the first places occupied in the right party, and they do not choose to take up with back

seats.' I have always known this to be true in the things of the world; but I think that pride should have nothing to do with the things of eternity."

Thus ended the conversation between the Count and Bossuet on the subject of religion for that night. Two guests had arrived, more soon followed, and the conversation became more general. Still, however, as there were many ecclesiastics, the subject of religion was more than once introduced, the restraint which the presence of a Protestant nobleman had occasioned on the first visit of the Count having now been removed. The evening passed over calmly and tranquilly, however, till about ten o'clock at night, when the Count took his leave, and departed. The rest of the guests stayed later; and on issuing out into the street the young nobleman found himself alone in a clear, calm, moonlight night, with the irregular shadows of the long line of houses chequering the pavement with the yellow lustre of the moon.

Looking up into the wide open square beyond, the shadows were lost, and there the bright planet of the night seemed to pour forth a flood of radiance without let or obstruction.

There was a fountain in the middle of the square, casting up its sparkling waters towards the sky, as if spirits were tossing about the moonbeams in their sport, and casting the bright rays from hand to hand. As the Count gazed, however, and thought that he would stroll on, giving himself up to calm reflection at that tranquil hour, and arranging his plans for the momentous future without disturbance from the hum of idle multitudes, a figure suddenly came between the fountain and his eyes, and crept slowly down on the dark side of the street towards him. He was standing at the moment in the shadow of Bossuet's porch, so as not to be seen: but the figure came down the street to the door of the Count's own dwelling, paused for a minute, as if in doubt, then walked over into the moonlight, and gazed up into the windows of the prelate's hotel. The Count instantly recognised the peculiar form and structure of his valet, Jerome Riquet, and, walking out from the porch towards his own house, he called the man to him, and asked if any thing were the matter.

“ Why yes, Sir,” said Riquet in a low voice, “ so much so that I thought of doing what I never did in my life before—sending in for you,

to know what to do. There has been a person seeking you twice or three times since you went, and saying he must speak with you immediately."

"Do you know him?" demanded the Count.

"Oh yes, I know him," answered Riquet; "a determined devil he is too; a man in whom you used to place much confidence in the army, and who was born, I believe, upon your own lands — Armand Herval, you know him well. I could give him another name if I liked."

"Well," said the Count, as tranquilly as possible; "what of him, Riquet? What does he want here?"

"Ay, Sir, that I can't tell," replied the man; "but I greatly suspect he wants no good. He is dressed in black from his head to his feet; and his face is black enough too, that is to say, the look of it. It was always like a thunder cloud, and now it is like a thunder cloud gone mad. I don't think the man is sane, Sir; and the third time he came down here, about ten minutes ago, he said he could not stop a minute, that he had business directly; and so he went away, pulling his great dark hat and feather over his head, as if to prevent people from seeing how his eyes were flashing; and then I

saw that the breast of his great heavy coat was full of something else than rosemary or honeycomb."

"What do you mean? what do you mean?" demanded the Count. "What had he in his breast?"

"Why, I mean pistols, Sir," said the man; "if I must speak good French, I say he had pistols, then. So thinking he was about some mischief, I crept after him from door to door, dodged him across the square, and saw him go in by a gate, that I thought was shut, into the garden behind the château. I went in after him, though I was in a desperate fright for fear any one should catch me; and I trembled so, that I shook three crowns in my pocket till they rang like sheep bells. I thought he would have heard me; but I watched him plant himself under one of the statues on the terrace, and there he stood like a statue himself. I defy you to have told the one from the other, or to have known Monsieur Herval from Monsieur Neptune. Whenever I saw that, I came back to look for you, and tell you what had happened; for you know, Sir, I am awfully afraid of fire-arms; and I had not even a pair of curling irons to fight him with."

"That must be near the apartments of Louvois," said the young Count thoughtfully. "This man may very likely seek to do him some injury."

"More likely the King, Sir," said the valet in a low voice. "I have heard that his Majesty walks there on that terrace every fine night after the play for half an hour. He is quite alone, and it would be as much as one's liberty is worth to approach him at that time."

"Come with me directly, Riquet," said the Count, "and show me where this is. Station yourself at the gate you mention after I have gone in, and if you hear me call to you aloud, instantly give the alarm to the sentries. Come, quick, for the play must soon be over."

Thus saying, the young Count strode on, crossed the place, and, under the guidance of Riquet, approached the gate through which Herval had entered. The key was in the lock on the outside, and the door ajar; and, leaving the man in the shadow, the Count entered alone. The gardens appeared perfectly solitary, sleeping in the moonlight. The principal water-works were still; and no sound or motion was to be seen or heard, but such as proceeded from the smaller fountains that were sparkling on the

terrace making the night musical with the plaintive murmur of their waters, or from the tops of the high trees as they were waved by the gentle wind. The palace was full of lights, and nothing was seen moving across any of the windows, so that it was evident that the play was not yet concluded; and the young Count looked about for the person he sought for a moment or two in vain.

At length, however, he saw the shadow cast by one of the groups of statues, alter itself somewhat in form; and instantly crossing the terrace to the spot, he saw Herval sitting on the first step which led from the terrace down to the gardens, his back leaning against the pedestal, and his arms crossed upon his chest. He did not hear the step of the young Count till he was close upon him; but the moment he did so, he started up, and drew a pistol from his breast. He soon perceived who it was, however; and the Count, saying in a low voice, “ My servants tell me you have been seeking me,” drew him, though somewhat unwilling apparently, down the steps.

“ What is it you wanted with me?” continued the Count, gazing in his face, to see whether the marks of insanity which Riquet had spoken of

were visible to him. But there was nothing more in the man's countenance than its ordinary fierce and fiery expression when stimulated by high excitement.

"I came to you, Count," he said, "to make you, if you will, the sharer of a glorious deed; and now you are here, you shall at least be the spectator thereof — the death of your great enemy — the death of him who tramples upon his fellow-creatures as upon grapes in the wine-press — the death of the slayer of souls and bodies."

"Do you mean Louvois?" said the Count in a calm tone.

"Louvois!" scoffed the man. "No! no! no! I mean him who gives fangs to the viper, and poison to the snake! I mean him without whom Louvois is but a bundle of dry reeds to be consumed to light the first fire that wants kindling, or to rot in its own emptiness! I mean the giver of the power, the lord of the persecutions: the harlot-monger, and the murderer, that calls himself King of France; and who, from that holy title, which he claims from God, thinks himself entitled to pile vice upon folly, and sin upon vice, and crime upon sin, till the destruction which he has so often courted to

his own head shall this night fall upon him. The first of the brutal murderers that he sent down to rob our happy hearths of the jewel of their peace, this hand has slain ; and the same that crushed the worm shall crush the serpent also."

The Count now saw that there was, indeed, in the state of Herval's mind, something different from its usual tone and character. It could hardly be said that the chief stay thereof was broken, so as to justify the absolute supposition of insanity ; but it seemed as if one of the fine filaments of the mental texture had given way, leaving all the rest nearly as it was before, though with a confused and morbid line running through the whole web. It need not be said that Albert of Morseiul was determined to prevent at all or any risk the act that the man proposed to commit ; but yet he wished to do so, without calling down death and torture on the head of one who was kindled almost into absolute madness, by wrongs which touched the finest affections of his heart, through religion and through love.

"Herval," he said, calmly, "I am deeply grieved for you. You have suffered, I know how dreadfully ; and you have suffered amongst the first of our persecuted sect : but still you

must let me argue with you, for you act regarding all this matter in a wrong light, and you propose to commit a great and terrible crime."

"Argue with me not, Count of Morseul!" cried the man; "argue with me not, for I will hear no arguments. Doubtless you would have argued with me, too, about killing that small pitiful insect, that blind worm, who murdered her I loved, and three or four noble and brave men along with her."

"I will tell you in a word, Herval," replied the Count, "had you not slain him, I would have done so. My hand against his, alone, and my life against his. He had committed a base, foul, ungenerous murder, for which I knew that the corrupted law would give us no redress, and I was prepared to shelter under a custom which I abhor and detest in general, the execution of an act of justice which could be obtained by no other means. Had it been but for that poor girl's sake, I would have slain him like a dog."

"Thank you, Count, thank you," cried the man, grasping his hand in his with the vehemence of actual phrensy. "Thank you for those words from my very soul. But he was not worthy of your noble sword. He died the

death that he deserved; strangled like a common felon, writhing and screaming for the mercy he had never shown."

To what he said on that head the Count did not reply; but he turned once more to the master immediately before them.

"Now, Herval," he said, "you see that I judge not unkindly or hardly by you. You must listen to my advice however —"

"Not about this, not about this," cried the man, vehemently; "I am desperate, and I am determined. I will not see whole herds of my fellow Christians slaughtered like swine to please the bloody butcher on the throne. I will not see the weak and the faint-hearted driven, by terror, to condemn their own souls and barter eternity for an hour of doubtful peace. I will not see the ignorant and the ill-instructed bought by scores, like cattle at a market. I will not see the infants torn from their mothers' arms to be offered a living sacrifice to the Moloch of Rome. This night he shall die, who has condemned so many others; this night he shall fall, who would work the fall of the pure church that condemns him. I will hear no advice: I will work the work for which I came, and then perish when I may. Was it not for

this that every chance has favoured me? Was it not for this that the key was accidentally left in the door till such time as I laid my hand upon it and took it away? Was it not for this that no eye saw me seize upon that key, this morning, though thousands were passing by? Was it not for this that such a thing should happen on the very night in which he comes forth to walk upon that terrace? And shall I now pause,—shall I now listen to any man's advice, who tells me that I must hold my hand?"

"If you will not listen to my advice," said the Count, "you must listen to my authority, Herval. The act you propose to commit you shall not commit."

"No!" cried he. "Who shall stop me?—Yours is but one life against mine, remember; and I care not how many fall, or how soon I fall myself either, so that this be accomplished."

"My life, as you say," replied the Count, "is but one. But even, Herval, if you were to take mine, which would neither be just nor grateful, if even you were to lose your own, which may yet be of great service to the cause of our faith, you could not, and you should not, take that of the King. If you are determined, I am determined too. My servant stands at

yonder gate, and on the slightest noise he gives the alarm. .Thus, then, I tell you," he continued, glancing his eyes towards the windows of the palace, across which various figures were now beginning to move; "thus, then, I tell you, you must either instantly quit this place with me, or that struggle begins between us, which, end how it may as far as I am concerned, must instantly insure the safety of the King, and lead you to trial and execution. The way is still open for you to abandon this rash project at once, or to call down ruin upon your own head without the slightest possible chance of accomplishing your object."

" You have frustrated me," cried the man, " you have foiled me ! You have overthrown, by preventing a great and noble deed, the execution of a mighty scheme for the deliverance of this land, and the security of our suffering church ! The consequences be upon your own head, Count of Morseuil ! the consequences be upon your own head ! I see that you have taken your measures too well, and that, even if you paid the just penalty for such interference, the result could not be accomplished."

" Come then," said the Count; " come, Her-

val, I must forgive anger as I have thwarted a rash purpose; but make what speed you may to quit the gardens, for, ere another minute be over, many a one will be crossing that terrace to their own apartments."

Thus saying, he laid his hand upon the man's arm, to lead him gently away from the dangerous spot on which he stood. But Herval shook off his grasp sullenly, and walked on before with a slow and hesitating step, as if, every moment, he would have turned in order to effect his purpose. The Count doubted and feared that he would do so, and glad was he, indeed, when he saw him pass the gate which led out of the gardens. As soon as Herval had gone forth, the young Count closed the door, locked it, and threw the key over the wall, saying, "There! thank God, it is now impossible!"

"Ay," replied the man. "But there are other things possible, Count; and things that may cause more bloodshed and more confusion than one little pistol shot.—It would have saved all France," he continued, muttering to himself, "it would have saved all France.—What a change!—But if we must fight it out in the field, we must."

While he spoke he walked onward towards

the Count's house, in a sort of gloomy but not altogether silent reverie; in the intervals of which, he spoke or murmured to himself in a manner which almost seemed to justify the opinion expressed by Riquet, that he was insane. Suddenly turning round towards the valet who followed, however, he demanded sharply, "Has there not been a tall man, with a green feather in his hat, asking for your lord two or three times to-day?"

"So I have heard," replied Riquet, "from the Swiss, but I did not see him myself."

"The Swiss never informed me thereof," said the Count. "Pray, who might he be, and what was his business?"

"His name, Sir," replied Herval, "is Hatréaumont, and his business was for your private ear."

"Hatrément!" said the Count in return. "What, he who was an officer in the guards?"

Herval nodded his head, and the Count went on: "A brave man, a determined man he was; but in other respects a wild rash profligate. He can have no business for my private ear, that I should be glad or even willing to hear."

"You know not that, Count," said Herval;

“ he has glorious schemes in view, schemes which perhaps may save his country.”

The Count shook his head; “schemes,” he said, “which will bring ruin on himself, and on all connected with him. I have rarely known or heard of a man unprincipled and profligate in private life, who could be faithful and just in public affairs. Such men there may be perhaps; but the first face of the case is against them; for surely they who are not to be trusted between man and man, are still less to be trusted when greater temptations lie in their way, and greater interests are at stake.”

“ Well, well,” said Herval, “he will not trouble you again. This was the last day of his stay in Paris, and ere to-morrow be two hours old, he will be far away.”

“ And pray,” demanded the Count, “was it by his advice — he who owes nothing but gratitude to the King — was it by his advice that you were stationed where I found you ?”

“ He knew nothing of it,” said the man sharply, “he knew nothing of it; nor did I intend that he should know, till it was all over — and now,” he continued, “what is to become of me ?”

“ Why, in the first place,” replied the Count

“ you had better come in with me and take some refreshment. While we are doing so, we will think of the future for you.”

The man made no reply, but followed the Count, who led the way into his house, and then ordered some refreshments of various kinds to be set before his guest from Poitou, examining the man’s countenance as he did so, and becoming more and more convinced that something certainly had given way in the brain to produce the wandering and unsettled eye which glared in his face, as well as the rash words and actions that he spoke and performed.

“ And now, Herval,” he said, as soon as they were alone, “ there is but one question which you should ask yourself,—whether it is better for you to return at once to Poitou, or, since you are so far on your way to Holland, to take advantage of that circumstance, and speed to the frontier without delay. I know not what is the situation of your finances; but if money be wanting for either step, I am ready to supply you as an old comrade.”

“ I want no money,” exclaimed the man; “ I am wealthy in my station beyond yourself. What have I to do with money whose life is not worth an hour? I have a great mind to divide

all I have into a hundred portions, spend one each day, and die at the end of it.—Holland ! no, no ; this is no time for me to quit France. I will be at my post at the coming moment ; I will set off again to-night for Poitou. But let me tell you, Count—for I had forgotten—if you should yourself wish to secure aught in Holland — and I have heard that there is a lady dearer to you than all your broad lands — remember there is a schoolmaster living three doors on this side of the barrier of Passy, called Vandennen, passing for a Fleming by birth, but in reality a native of Dort. He has regular communication with his native land, and will pass any thing you please with the utmost security.”

“ I thank you for that information sincerely,” replied the Count ; “ it may be most useful to me. But give me one piece of information more,” he added, as the man rose after having drank a glass of water, with a few drops of wine in it. “ What was the state of the province when you left it ?”

“ If you mean, Count, what was the state of the reformed party,” said Herval, gazing round with a look of wild carelessness, “ it was a girl in a consumption, where something is lost every day, no one knows how, and yet the whole looks

as pretty as ever, till there is nothing but a skeleton remains. But there will be this difference, Count, there will be this difference. There will be strength found in the skeleton ! Have you not heard ? There were three thousand men, together with women and children, all converted at once, within ten miles of Niort ; and it cost the priest so much bread and wine giving them the sacrament, that he swore he would make no more converts unless the King would double the value of the cure—ha ! ha ! ha !” and laughing loud and wildly, he turned upon his heel and left the room without bidding the Count good night.

CHAPTER X.

THE DECISION.

ABOUT seven o'clock on the following morning, Jerome Riquet entered his master's room on tip toe, drew the curtains of his bed, and found him leaning on his arm, reading attentively. The subject of the Count's studies matters not. They were interrupted immediately; for a note, which the valet placed in his hands, caused him instantly to spring up to order his horses to be prepared with speed, and to set off for Paris at once, without waiting for the morning meal. The note which caused this sudden expedition contained but a few words. They were —

“ Come to me immediately, if you can, for I have matter of deep moment on which I wish to speak with you. You must not come, however, to the Hôtel de Rouvré, for though it may seem strange in me to name another place to meet you, yet you will find with me one whom you will be surprised to see. I must not then hesitate to ask you to seek me towards ten

o'clock, at number five in the street of the Jacobins ; the house is that of a bookbinder, and in the shop you will find Maria."

It had no signature ; but the handwriting was that of Clémence. All that had occurred within the last few days had shown the Count de Morseuil that the crisis of his fate was approaching, that a very few days, nay, a very few hours, might decide the fortunes of his future life for ever. The multitude of matters which had pressed for his consideration during the two or three preceding days, the various anxieties that he had suffered, the mingling of joy and hope with pain and apprehension, had all created a state of mind in which it was difficult to think calmly of the future. Now, however, he had regained complete mastery of his own mind : the short interval of repose which had taken place had removed all confusion, all agitation, from his thoughts ; and as he rode on towards Paris somewhat slowly, finding that there was more than the necessary time to accomplish his journey, he revolved coolly and deliberately in his own mind the peculiar points in his situation, and questioned himself as to his conduct and his duty in regard to each.

First, then, of course, came the image of

Clémence; and in regard to his love for her, and her's for him, there was many a question to be asked, which was answered by his own heart, whether altogether fairly and candidly or not, those who know love and love's nature can best declare. In asking her to fly with him from France, then, he was going to take her from wealth, and splendour, and luxury, and soft nurture, and all the comforts and conveniences which, surrounding her from her earliest years, had made to her eyes poverty, and difficulty, and distress, seem but a recorded dream of which she knew nothing but that some men had felt such things.

He had to offer her in a foreign land, indeed, competence, mere competence; but would competence to her, educated as she had been educated, be any thing else than another name for poverty? Even that competence itself might perhaps be insecure. It depended upon the doubtful faith of foreign merchants, from whom he had no security, and if that were gone, he had nought to depend upon but his sword, and a high name in arms. Could Clémence bear all this? he asked himself. Could the gay, the admired, the adored, endure seclusion and retirement, and almost solitude? Could the spoilt

child of fortune undergo privation? Could she, who had been accustomed but to command to be obeyed, be contented with scanty service from foreign servants? Would she never repine? Would she never look back to the bright land of France, and think with regret of the high station from which she had voluntarily descended? Would she never even, by one repining thought in the depth of her heart, reproach him for having won her away, to share his exile and misery? Would he never see upon her countenance one shade of sorrow and dissatisfaction when petty cares weighed down the mind made for greater things, when small anxieties and daily discomforts interrupted the current of finer and higher thoughts, or when disrespect and coldness made the sad change felt to her, upon whose words the brightest and the best had hung?

His heart answered, No; that none of these things would ever arise to make him feel that he should not have taken her from her high fortunes to share his reverses. What could not love do, he asked himself, to brighten the lowliest lot? The grand face of nature would be still before them inexhaustible as a store of enjoyment; the communion of two high minds, he felt, could never be wanting while they were

united: if they retained competence, they had all that was needful; and if for a time worse fell upon them, love would surely be strong enough to excite them to every effort and every exertion, each for the other, to cheer, to encourage, to alleviate; and would bring, too, its own reward. Besides, he remembered that he should never have to reproach himself with having led Clémence to difficulty and to danger — a reproach which, could it have been brought against him by conscience, would have imbibited all his joys — for her own situation, her own faith, required flight as well as his; and by making her his own, he only secured to her protection, support, affection, and guidance.

Such were some of the thoughts which crossed his mind regarding Clémence; but there was another consideration of more difficulty, a question on which he was less satisfied. His fellow Protestants throughout the land, and more especially those who looked up to him for aid and for direction, should he now leave them to their fate, even though he could not avert from them one blow, even though he could not save them from one single pang? Should he not stay to share their lot, to comfort or to fall with them?

The question would have been answered to

once, had they been firm and united amongst themselves. It needed not, indeed, that they should have armed to resist the royal authority against which they had no power to contend ; it needed not that they should have attempted to build up the churches which had been thrown down, to replace the ministers who had been ejected, to petition for the restoration of rights which injustice had snatched from them : it needed none of these things to have induced him, without hesitation, to stay and partake of all that might befall them, if they had displayed a resolution of remaining calmly, firmly, though peaceably, attached to their faith, addressing their prayers to God in private, if public worship was forbidden them, and opposing to the iniquitous proceedings of their enemies that tranquil steady resistance of endurance, which seldom fails in ultimately repelling attack.

Had they so acted, the Count de Morseuil would have had no hesitation ; but such was not the case. Even before the last severe measures, which have been recorded in this book, the inconveniences attending their situation, the apprehension of worse, and the prospect of immediate gain, had caused annually the conversion of hundreds of the Protestant population of

France to the Roman Catholic faith. Nothing like a spirit of union had reigned amongst them for years ; and now that danger and persecution fell upon them, each day brought to the court tidings of thousands upon thousands having at once professed conversion. Each bishop, each intendant, sent daily lists of the numbers who had quitted the religion of their fathers to embrace that of the state ; and in almost all quarters, those who had courage to sacrifice something for conscience sake, were flying from the land, or preparing for flight.

He, too, had to remember that he was himself placed in a situation more difficult and dangerous than the rest. The question was not whether he should remain adhering calmly to his own faith, and living in tranquillity, though under oppression, or should fly to a foreign land ; but there was a choice of three acts before him : whether he should remain to trial and perpetual imprisonment, if not death ; or retiring to Poitou at once, raise the standard of hopeless revolt ; or seek security in another country, leaving those to whom he could render no possible service.

The voice of reason certainly said, Fly ! but yet it was painful to him to do so. Independent

of all thoughts of what he left behind — the dwelling of his infancy, the tombs of his fathers, the bright land of his birth — independent of all this, there was the clinging to his own people, which few can feel deeply but those circumstanced as he was ; which none indeed can feel now, when the last vestiges have been swept away of a system which, though in no slight degree dangerous and evil, had nevertheless many an amiable and many an admirable point. He loved not to leave them, he loved not to leave any fellow sufferer behind while he provided for his own safety; and though reason told him that on every motive he ought to fly, yet he felt that lingering inclination to remain, which required the voice of others to conquer entirely.

Such were the principal questions which his mind had found to discuss during the last two days ; but since the preceding night, a new subject for thought had arisen, a new question presented itself. It however was not so difficult of solution as the others. A dark attempt upon the King's life, which could hardly have failed of success, had been nearly executed ; but that was not all. From Herval he had learned, that schemes, which there was much reason to believe were dangerous to the whole state, were at that

moment in agitation, if not upon the point of being accomplished. He loved not to be the denouncer of any man ; and for Herval himself, he felt pity mingled with blame, which made him glad that the length of time that had elapsed, had given him an opportunity of retiring once more to Poitou.

With regard to the proceedings of Hatréumont, however, he had no scruple and no hesitation. It was right and necessary that the King should be made acquainted with the fact of dangerous designs being in agitation ; and although he was well aware, that the task of informing the monarch of the truth would be a difficult and delicate one, so as not to bring the strong and unscrupulous hand of power upon persons who might be innocent, and were only accused by the word of a man whom he sincerely believed to be partially insane, yet he resolved to undertake that task, trusting to the firmness and uprightness of his own character, to insure that the execution of it should be such as to avoid doing injury to any one who was not guilty.

Men under such circumstances in general err from an inaccuracy or deficiency of statement, proceeding from the confusion and uncertainty

of a mind oppressed and agitated by the burthen of important affairs, or difficult and intricate circumstances. The Count de Morseul, however, saw his way clearly, and prepared to tell the King exactly the words which Herval had made use of, but at the same time to inform him, that he had much reason to believe that the man was insane, and that, therefore, but little reliance was to be placed upon his statement, except so far as the employing of precaution might be required.

The meditation over all these circumstances fully occupied the time till his arrival in Paris; and dismounting at his own house, he took his way alone and on foot towards the Rue des Jacobins. The capital at that period had but little of the light and graceful architectural beauty which the citizens have since endeavoured to give it; but there was, instead, a grey, mysterious looking grandeur about the vast piles of building of which it was composed, peculiar and entirely characteristic of the French metropolis. The great height of the houses, the smallness, in general, of the windows, their multitudes, their irregularities, the innumerable carriage entrances leading into court yards where cities and new worlds seemed to be open-

ing on every side, the intricate alleys and passages that were seen branching here and there in unknown directions as the stranger took his way through the streets ; every thing, in short, impressed upon the mind, as a keen and sensible perception, that fact, which, though common to all great capitals, is generally unfelt, that we are walking in the midst of a world of human beings with whom we have scarcely one feeling in sympathy ; of whose habits, character, pursuits, pleasures, and pains we are utterly ignorant ; who are living, moving, acting, feeling, undergoing life's great ordeal, smiling with rapture, writhing with anguish, melting with the bitter tears of sorrow and regret, inspired by hope, or palpitating with expectation around us on every side, without our having the slightest participation in any of their feelings, with scarcely a knowledge of their existence, and certainly none of their situation.

It was impossible to walk through the streets of Paris at that time — it was impossible even to walk through the older parts of the city when I myself remember it, without having that sensation strongly excited — without asking one's self as one gazed up at the small windows of some of the many tenanted houses, and saw the half-

drawn curtain shading out even the scanty portion of sun that found its way thither : Is there sickness or death within ? Are there tears over the departing couch of the beloved ? Is there anguish over the bier of the gone ? without asking one's self, as one gazed at some wide-open casement, courting the summer air, and perhaps with some light piece of drapery floating out into the street, Is that the abode of love and joy ? Is happy heart there meeting happy heart ? Are they smiling over the birth of the first-born, or watching the glad progress of a young spirit kindred with their own ? without asking one's self, as the eye rested upon some squalid doorway, foul with uncleaned ages, or some window, thick and obscure with the dust of years, some dim alley, or some dark and loathsome passage, Is vice, and plunder, and iniquity there ? Is there the feverish joy of sin mingled with remorse, and anguish, and apprehension ? Is there the wasting and the gnawing effects of vice, sickness, and sorrow, worn limbs, corroded heart, nights of restless watchfulness, and days of ceaseless anguish ? It was impossible to walk through that tall city, with its myriads living above myriads, house within house, and court within court, without asking one's self such questions,

and without feeling that the whole intense and thrilling reality of the scene was rendered but more striking by the gay and careless multitude that tripped along, each seeming scarcely conscious that there was another being in the world but himself.

The Count de Morseil was half an hour before his time ; he walked somewhat slowly, and in picturing the feelings which a contemplative mind might experience in passing through Paris, we have pictured those which pressed for his attention, and crossed from time to time the current of his other thoughts. At length, however, he entered the Rue des Jacobins, and easily found the house to which he had been directed. It was a tall building of six stories, with a bookseller's shop upon the ground floor. Very different indeed, however, was it from a gay dwelling such as Paris now exhibits, with every new publication in blue and yellow flaming in the windows : but, through a small door, entrance was obtained into a long dark shop, where, on shelves, and in cases, and on benches, and on counters, were piled up manifold dusty volumes, whose state of tranquil slumber seemed to have been long undisturbed. A single pale apprentice, with an apron on and a brush

in his hand, walked from one end of the shop to the other, or examined with slow inactivity the sheets of some unbound work, moving about his task with the same indifference to its speedy execution, as if the years of Mathuselah were bound up in his indentures.

The Count looked at the shop well, to ascertain that he was right, and then entered; but in the long dim vista of the counters and packages, the person he sought for was not to be seen; and not having contemplated such an occurrence, he was somewhat embarrassed as to the person he should ask for. To have inquired whether a lady were waiting for him there or not, might perhaps have been received as an insult by the master of the house, and yet he thought it would be imprudent to risk the name of Clémence de Marly, when she herself might not have given it. He felt sure that had she arrived, her attendant Maria would have been at the post where she had promised to place her; and, in order to occupy the time till she came, he determined to ask for some book, and then enter into desultory conversation with the lad in the shop, after having bought it.

He had scarcely spoken, however, when from behind a pile of solid literature which obscured

still farther the end of the shop, the servant Maria came forth and advanced towards him. The matter was then easily explained, and the youth seemed in no degree surprised at the appointment, but proceeded to tie up the book which the Count had demanded, while Maria told him that her young lady had only just arrived, and was waiting for him up stairs. He followed her with a rapid step as she led the way, and at the third turning of a long dim narrow staircase, he found Clémence waiting at a door and listening as if for his arrival.

There was something in the meeting under such circumstances which did away all feelings of reserve, such as perhaps might otherwise have still affected them towards each other; and Clémence, feeling that she was all his — that their fate was united for ever, felt scarcely a blush rise into her cheek when he, at once, pressed her to his heart upon their meeting. She spoke not, however, but held up her finger, as if to enjoin silence, and then led him through a little anteroom into a room beyond.

There, seated at a table with some books scattered upon it, appeared the good pastor of Auron, Claude de l'Estang. He was thinner, paler, more worn, than when first we endeavoured to

depict him ; but the light was not gone out in the clear bright eye, the same mild but intelligent smile hung upon the lip, the same high spirit was thrown upon the brow. He rose and grasped the young Count's hands eagerly.

“ Oh, my dear Albert,” he said, “ I am glad to see you ! This sweet child,” he added, after the first exclamation, “ wrote to me all that was between you and her. She is dear to my heart as if she were my own ; and is she not my own ? Did I not bring her back to the faith of her dear mother ? Did I not rescue her from the evils of a corrupt perverted church ? But of that we will speak not now, Albert. The moment I heard of it — the moment I heard that you were here, and had cast yourself, as it were, into the jaws of the lion, after the fatal night when that murderous youth, like Pilate, mingled our blood with our sacrifices — I resolved at once to make my way hither, at all and any risks, to speak to you, to exhort you, to tell you what I have decided in my own mind is the only plan for you to follow. I thought, indeed, when I set out — notwithstanding all that has occurred since you left Poitou, notwithstanding the scattering of the sheep and the driving forth of the shepherd, and the falling off of many, and the wavering of all the

rest—I thought that here I might learn tidings which might make a change in my opinion, but that, at all events, it was right for me to come, in order that I might consult with you and others, and take our last final determination together. But, since I have heard from this dear child the situation in which you are placed, since I have heard from a weak brother, who has outwardly abjured the faith which he fondly clings to in his heart, things that you yourselves do not know, my opinion has been confirmed to the fullest extent, and I have only to say to you, Albert, fly ! Fly with her immediately ; save her from persecution, and anguish, and care ; confirm her in the only true faith, and in the renunciation of every superstitious vanity of the church of Rome ! Strengthen her, support her, protect her ! Lose no time — no, not a day ; for, if you do, danger to both, and, perhaps, everlasting separation in this world may be the consequence."

" I am most ready and most willing," replied the Count. " It is absolutely necessary, indeed, that I should return to Versailles, but only for a few hours. After that, I can return hither, and, without further delay, execute what I am fully convinced is the only plan for us to pursue."

"It is the only plan," said the clergyman. "Are you aware, Albert, that, in the short space of five days, one half of the Protestants of Poitou have bent the knee to Baal? Are you aware that the very men who, a week ago, clung to you for aid and protection, would now fly from you, either in shame at their own degeneracy, or because you are marked out for indignation by the powers that be? Yes, Albert, they would fly from you! There is a remnant, indeed, faithful and true unto the last; but to them I shall say, as I say to you, they must go forth to other lands, and shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against this place. There is nothing left you, Albert, but flight, and that speedy and unhesitating. I have told you that I have heard much from a weak brother, whose renunciation of his faith weighs heavy upon him. He is in the confidence, it would seem, of those who rule; and he has informed me that it is the determination of the Monarch and his council never to let you quit the court of France except as a follower of the popish church of Rome. Every temptation is to be held out to you to make you yield, every menace used to drive you on the way they want; and should your resistance become strong and

decided, the order for your arrest is already made out, and needs but one word to cause its execution. Fly, then, fly, Albert, and even if not for your own sake for hers."

"I am most willing, my good friend," replied the Count. "I need no exhortation so to do. But is Clémence still willing to go with me?"

"Can you doubt it, Albert," she said, "with *his* approbation and advice?"

"Yet, dear Clémence," said the Count, "I should be wrong were I not to tell you what may happen. The danger, the risk of our escape, the fatigues, and labours, and anxieties of the journey, the perils that await us at every step you have made up your mind to. But, Clémence, have you thought of the change from affluence to mere competence, from splendour and luxury to bare necessities, even perhaps to poverty itself, for all I have on earth depends upon the good faith of those to whom I have transmitted it, and I might arrive and find nothing. Have you thought of all this? Have you thought that it may last for years, that we may have to live, and die, and bring up our children in poverty — ?"

"Out upon it, Albert!" exclaimed the old

man, angrily ; “ wouldst thou take the part of the prince of this world against her better angel ? But she will not doubt, she will not waver : I know she will not. Sooner than be a hypocrite, sooner than abandon truth and embrace error, she would cast herself upon the world, were it ten thousand times as bad — Out upon it ! she fears not ; she will have her husband, and her faith, and her God to support her.”

“ I have not thought of all you suggest, Albert,” replied Clémence more mildly, but still somewhat reproachfully, “ I have not thought of them, because it was unnecessary to think of them at all. Do you not love me, Albert ? Do I not love you ? Is not that love riches, and splendour, and luxury enough for us ? But when, beside that all-sufficient love, we have the knowledge that we are doing our duty, that we are suffering for our conscience sake, that we have left all to follow what we believe the dictates of the great Author of our faith, there will be a satisfaction, a pride, a glory, that even a woman’s heart can feel. Fear not for me, Albert ; I understand your scruples, and though they require forgiveness I forgive them. Let us be guided by his advice,—I am sure that it is good,—and I am willing, most willing, to risk all and every

thing under such circumstances, and for such a cause."

" Well then, so be it," said the Count; " let us consider our decision as made. This very night, Clémence, I will return to Paris. This very night I will meet you here; but oh, my good friend," he continued, turning to the pastor, " you whom I love and venerate as a father, you will easily understand what I feel when I say, that I could wish most anxiously that this dear girl, who is to accompany me through scenes of some peril, were united to me before we depart, not alone by the bonds of deep and true affection, not alone by the bonds of all the mutual promises and engagements which man and woman can plight towards each other, but by the sanction of that holy religion which first instituted such an union, and by the blessing of one of the ministers of Christ. I fear, however, it cannot be done."

" Nay, my son, it can," replied the clergyman. " Expelled from our temples, debarred from the performance of all those ceremonial rites, which are but the shadows and types of higher things, the abandonment of such ceremonies as we cannot exercise, can, in no degree, either in the sight of man or of God, as long as

the side of law or justice is considered, affect the validity of such a contract, or do away, in the slightest degree, the solemn legality of an union complete in all the forms which we are enabled to give it. Even were it not so, I have power delegated to me by the synod of our church, without application to higher authorities, whose approbation, for many years, would have been difficult and embarrassing to obtain, to perform all the ceremonies of the church, upon due knowledge certified by me that they are not contrary, in the particular cases, to the law of God, or to those just ordinances of man to which we have ourselves subscribed. If you desire it, and if Clémence is willing, I will this very night, before you depart, give my blessing to your union, and doubt not that, with my certificate thereof, witnessed by proper witnesses, that union will be held good by the Protestant church throughout the world."

"Then I fear not," exclaimed the Count. "What say you, dear Clémence? Can you resolve upon this also,—speak, dear girl," he added as she paused in silence, covering her eyes with her hand. "Speak! oh speak!"

"What should I say, Albert?" she said. "Do you dream that I would refuse? Do you sup-

pose that I would reject the only thing which was wanting to give me confidence, and strength, and hope through all the perils that we may have to undergo?"

Albert gazed on her with a look that thanked her to the full; and, after a brief moment given to happiness, he asked, "But who shall be the witnesses?"

"Maria must be one," said Clémence, "for she of course goes with us."

"One of my servants may be another," said the Count. "But it is better to have several."

"The master of this house and his son," said Claude de l'Estang, "will make up a number more than sufficient; and all that remains, Albert, is for you to go and settle your affairs at Versailles, and return hither as soon as you may; though I wish, indeed, that it were possible for you not to go back to that place at all."

"Indeed it is quite necessary," replied the Count; "not contemplating this meeting, I have left all the little store of wealth which I brought with me from Poitou in my house at Versailles. It is impossible to send for it without causing instant suspicion, and it is absolutely necessary, not only for the expences of the

journey, but in order to secure some little sum for our subsistence, for a year or two, in case we shall find that, either by misfortune or by fraud, the money which I transmitted to Holland is not forthcoming."

"It is, indeed, most necessary," said Claude de l'Estang. "I have heard that one of our poor ministers, who was banished some years ago from Languedoc, suffered most terribly in foreign lands before he could gain employment."

"But I can bring in my share," exclaimed Clémence, her eyes sparkling with gladness. "I have a number of jewels, of different kinds; many purchased in other days with my own money; many given me by friends of my youth long years ago. They have cost, I know, in all many thousand livres. These are my own, and I will take them with me. Those that I have received from the Duke and Duchess, and other Roman Catholic friends, I shall leave to be given back to them again."

"Do so, do so!" said the pastor. "There are some people, my dear child, who would wring a text from Scripture to bid you do the contrary, telling you to spoil the Egyptians; but I think that such injunctions as that must ever

be applicable to particular cases alone, and the application must be made by God himself. I say, leave all that is not justly and absolutely your own : leave all that those who gave it would not give now, if they could see the use to which you are going to apply it. We shall rarely regret, my child, if ever, having been too just ; we shall never cease to regret if we are once unjust."

The Count de Morseuil had remarked that, through the whole of this conversation, the pastor had never once mentioned himself or his own plans. It might however seem, that he left it to be understood that he, too, was about to fly from the land ; but the Count de Morseuil knew him well, and was aware that he was one of those who would resolutely and firmly place himself in the way of perils which he would teach others to avoid. He did not choose even to suppose that the pastor was about to remain in the land which he advised them to quit ; and he, therefore, demanded, "At what hour, my good friend, will you be ready to give us your blessing and to go with us ?"

"My son," replied the pastor, "I will give my blessing on your union at any hour you like, for I dare not go out during the day.

But, alas, I must not think of going with you. I say not, that I will not come hereafter, if Heaven enable me to do so; but it must be after I have seen every one of my flock, who is willing to sacrifice temporal to eternal things, in safety in another land before me. Nay, nay, Albert," he said, seeing the Count about to reply, "urge me not in this matter, for I am sure I am right, and when such is the case I must be immoveable. As soon as all who are willing to go are gone, I will obey the injunction of the King, which orders the pastors and ministers of our church to quit the realm immediately —"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Count. "Has such an order been issued? I never heard of it."

"You hear, my son, very little here," replied the old man. "Care is taken to keep unpleasant sights from the eyes of kings and courtiers. Pomp, and pageantry, and display, luxury and feasting, and music, and games, and revelry, they are the things for palaces and capitals; not the groans and tears of the wronged and injured, not the cries and murmurs of the oppressed. Some days have passed since the order appeared throughout all the provinces, and many of my

brethren have already obeyed. I will obey it, too, but not till the last."

"Oh," cried Clémence, "dear and excellent friend, do not, do not expose yourself too far. Remember how much we may need your council and assistance hereafter. Remember what a stay and support your presence may be to the whole of your flock in other lands."

"Those who do not fulfil their duties now, Clémence," said the pastor, "upon the pretext of fulfilling them better hereafter, will fulfil none at all, my child. But say no more either of you; my determination is strong and fixed: and now, Albert," he added, with a faint smile, "find some way of measuring her finger for the ring that is to make her yours, and if you could get some friendly notary to draw up a regular contract of marriage between you against this evening, all would be complete."

Albert of Morseiul took the fair hand of his promised bride, which she gave him with a blushing cheek, to measure it for the ring that was to be the symbol of their union. Upon the very finger was that ring which he had rescued for her when it had been taken away by the band of Herval, the coronet and the cypher in diamonds; and as he gazed upon it and tried

it on his own finger, to judge of the size, a brief feeling of curiosity passed through his heart, and he thought, “This, indeed, is strange: I am about to wed one, of whose history, and fate, and circumstances, both I myself, and almost every one around me, are ignorant.”

He lifted his look to her face, however, while he thus thought. Those large, pure, beautiful eyes were gazing upon him with tenderness and trust, and, replacing the ring upon her finger, he sealed his faith and confidence upon that fair hand with a kiss.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KING'S CLOSET.

DURING the time that the young Count was absent from Versailles and busied, as we have represented, with those schemes on which his future woe or welfare seemed beyond all doubt to depend, a scene was taking place in the palace of the King, in which the Count was more interested than he could have supposed possible, and which, as will be seen at the close of this history, was destined to affect him as much as any of his own proceedings.

The scene, then, was in the King's cabinet at Versailles. A clock of a rich and singular construction stood exactly before the Monarch, marking out to him the portions of time which he could bestow upon each separate affair as it was brought before him. A large inkstand, containing innumerable pens, and a portfolio, half filled with writing, in the King's own hand, lay upon the table; wax of four different colours,

blue, red, white, and yellow, were also placed before him, in a small case of marquetry, which contained likewise several seals, and an instrument of a peculiar form for spreading the wax: the walls were ornamented with a few very choice small pictures; a number of maps were there also, and a few, but very few, books.

The Monarch was seated in a large arm chair, his right foot supported by a footstool, and his hand holding a pen as it rested on the table. The expression of his countenance was mild but intelligent, and before him stood — a little pale indeed, and affecting, certainly, greater awe and terror than he really did feel — a man, whom, as we described him before, may be passed over in silence as far as his personal appearance is concerned. This was no other than Jerome Riquet, the valet of the Count of Morseuil; and behind him appeared the figure of Bontems, Louis's confidential attendant, who instantly retreated in silence from the chamber, on a slow nod of the head from the King.

“Your name,” said the Monarch, fixing his eyes full upon Riquet, “is, I understand, Jerome Riquet, and you are valet to the young Count of Morseuil.”

“I have been his faithful valet in the field,

and the camp, and the court, and the castle, for these many years, Sire," replied the man.

" And I hear," continued the King, " that you are a member of the holy catholic church, while your lord is of the religion which its professors call reformed. Now, answer me truly, how have you contrived—during the long period of service, surrounded, as you were, by Huguenot fellow servants and under a Huguenot lord — how have you contrived to fulfil the duties of your religion, I say, under such circumstances?"

" Oh, Sire, nothing so easy," replied the man. " May it please your Majesty, I was much better off, in most respects, than my brother Catholics ; for on a fast day, Sire, by my lord's order, on my account, there was either fish, or some other meagre dish prepared, so that I had my choice. I could fast and grow thin, or sin and grow fat, as I thought fit."

The King's countenance fell a little at an uncalled-for joke in his presence, especially on a subject which, in his eyes, was of serious importance. Louis, however, was very rarely disposed to say a harsh word, unless it was impossible to help it; and he therefore passed over the valet's levity with merely the reproof

of that displeased look, and then again demanded,—

“ So, then, your lord gave you every facility of fulfilling the duties of your religion ?”

“ The greatest, Sire,” replied the man. “ Except when we were in Holland, where there was no Catholic church to be found, he has always driven me to mass as if with a scourge. Even at Morseiul, scarcely a Sunday passed without his telling me to go to mass, and asking me if I had been.”

“ This looks well for the young gentleman,” said the King, seemingly well pleased with the account the man afforded. “ We have had different stories at court — that he was rank and bigoted, and furious against the Catholic religion.”

“ Lord bless your Majesty !” exclaimed the man, “ he is more than three quarters of a Catholic himself, and if the devil gets the other quarter it will only be because the Count is driven to him.”

“ Speak not profanely, Sir, of things that are serious,” said the King, “ nor presume, in my presence, to venture upon such jests.”

As he spoke, the whole aspect of his countenance changed, his brow grew dark, his lip

curled, his voice became deeper, his head more erect, and that indescribable majesty, for which he was famous, took possession of his person, making the unfortunate Jerome Riquet ready to sink into the earth.

“ Now, Sir,” continued the King, “ be not frightened ; but give me clear and straight-forward answers in a serious tone. What you have told me of your young lord is satisfactory to me. I am most anxious to do him good and to show him favour. I have marked his gallant conduct as a soldier, and his upright and noble demeanour as a French gentleman, and I would fain save him from the destruction to which obstinacy may lead him. You say that he is three parts a Catholic already, and would be one altogether if it were not — at least so I understand you — that some one drove him to the contrary conduct. Now, who is it drives him, Sir ? Speak to me plainly and explicitly, and no harm shall come to you.— Have you lost your tongue, Sir, or are you struck dumb ? ” the King continued, seeing that Riquet remained silent, while his whole frame seemed to work with terror and agitation.

Perhaps, had his lord been there, he might

have discovered, at once, that Riquet was working himself up to assume an immense deal more of terror than he really felt; but the King, conscious of having assumed an overawing look which he had often seen produce effects somewhat similar, believed the fear of the valet to be entirely real, and was not at all surprised to see Riquet suddenly cast himself at his feet and burst into an amazing flood of tears.

“ If I have offended your Majesty,” cried the man, with a species of orientalism which was not at all displeasing to the ears of the despotic monarch of the French, “ if I have offended your Majesty, take my head! But you are now proceeding to question me upon matters in which what I have to tell and to speak of, may produce the most terrible results. I know not every word I utter that I may not be doing wrong — I know not that every word may not cost my life — and unless your Majesty will deign to grant me in writing your full and free pardon for all that I have done, I dare not, indeed I dare not go on; or if I do, terror will make me prevaricate, and attempt to conceal facts that the wisdom of your Majesty will soon discover.”

“ Nay, nay,” exclaimed the King; “ before

I give you such pardon, my good friend, I must know to what it extends. You may have committed twenty crimes, for aught I know; you may be a relapsed heretic, for aught I know."

" So help me God, Sire, no," exclaimed the man vehemently: " I am a sincere, devout, and zealous Catholic, and have been so all my life. Here is the certificate of the parish priest in Poitou, Sire, in order that I might have the benefit of the indulgence," and he drew forth from his pocket a small piece of written paper which Louis read attentively, and which bestowed upon him so high a character for devotion to the Catholic faith, and for various other extraordinary virtues, that Louis thought he could not be far wrong in assuring him of the pardon he wanted, especially as Riquet, while he read, had relapsed into a passion of tears, and the moments allotted to the task of examining him were fleeting rapidly away. " Well," he said, " to make you at ease, I will grant you the pardon, under some conditions."

" And pray put in, Sire," cried Riquet, with real joy sparkling in his eyes, " pray put in that you take me under your royal protection, for fear the Count should be angry, or any of the

heretics should attempt to take vengeance upon me."

"That I will do also," replied Louis, and taking the pen he wrote rapidly a paper which, according to the old English form, would have been somewhat to the following effect, though the beginning of it, "*A tous ceux*," &c. may be somewhat freely translated.

"Know all men by these presents, that we, for especial reasons thereunto us moving, have granted our full and free pardon unto the person called Jerome Hardouin Riquet, for all crimes or offences that he may have committed up to the date of these presents, always excepted any crime which he may have committed against the holy church or our sovereign state of which he is not at this time charged, and which may be hereafter proved against him, and that we do also take the said Jerome Hardouin Riquet under our especial protection, warning all men to have regard unto the same, for such is our will.

"LOUIS."

The King read the paper over, paused for a moment, as if he yet hesitated whether he should give it or not, and then with a sort of

half smile, and a look expressive of something between carelessness and magnanimity, he held it out to the valet, who seized it and kissed it repeatedly. Then standing up before the monarch, he said, —

“ Now, Sire, safe in your Majesty’s protection, I am ready and capable of answering distinctly and clearly any thing that you may ask me.”

The King took the paper up again, into which he had looked to ascertain the various denominations of Maître Riquet, and then recommenced his questions as follows, returning in the first place to the one which Riquet had left unanswered, “ Who and what are the people who are driving, or are likely to drive, your master to remain obstinate in heresy.”

“ Please your Majesty,” replied Riquet, “ the principal persons are, a very reverend and respectable gentleman, called the Abbé de St. Helie; also, the intendant of the province of Poitou, our reverend father the Bishop of Poitiers, Monsieur de Louvois, and I am not very sure that good Monsieur de Rouvré himself has not a part.”

The King gazed at the bold speaker for a

moment or two, as if doubtful of his real intention ; asking of himself whether the man spoke sincerely and simply, or whether a daring jest, or a still more impudent sarcasm, lay concealed in the words he used. The man's previous terror, however, and the air of perfect unconsciousness of offence with which he spoke, did much to convince Louis that he had no double meaning. His tone, however, was sharp and angry, as he asked, “ How now, Sir ? How can some of the best and wisest, the most prudent and the most zealous men in the realm, drive any heretic to refuse obstinately the cup of salvation offered to him ? I trust, you mean no offence, sirrah ! ”

Jerome Riquet’s countenance instantly fell, and with a thousand lamentations and professions of profound respect for Louvois and St. Helie, and every one whom the King might trust and favour, he declared, that his only meaning was, that he believed his master and a great many other Protestants would have been converted long ago, if they had been led rather than driven. He added, that he had heard the young Count and the old one too say a thousand times, that some of the gentlemen he mentioned had done as much to prevent the Protestants

from returning to the mother church, as Monsieur Bossuet had done to bring them back to it.

Louis paused and thought, and had not his prepossessions been so complete as they were, the plain truth which the valet told him might not have been unproductive of fruit. As it was it went in some degree to effect the real object which Riquet had in view; namely, to impress the King with a notion, that there was a great probability of the young Count being recalled to the bosom of the Catholic church, provided the means employed were gentleness and persuasion.

It is very seldom, indeed, in this life, that we meet with any thing like pure and unmixed motives, and such were certainly not to be expected in the bosom of Jerome Riquet. His first object and design was certainly to serve his master; but, in so serving him, he had an eye to gratifications of his own also; for to his feelings and disposition Versailles was a much pleasanter place than Morseul, Paris a more agreeable land than Poitou. He used to declare, that he was fond of the country, but liked it paved; that his avenues should always be houses, and his flocks and herds wear coats

and petticoats. He naturally calculated, then, that if the King undertook the task of converting the young Count by gentle and quiet means, he would not fail to keep him in the delightful sojourning place of Versailles, while he, Jerome Riquet, amongst all the gods and goddesses of brass and marble, which were gathered together in the gardens, might play the part of Proteus, and take a thousand shapes, as might suit his versatile genius.

The King thought over the reply of Riquet for some moments, somewhat struck by hearing that the arguments which the Protestants held amongst themselves were exactly similar to those which they had often put forth in addressing him. So much skill, however, had been employed by his council and advisers to open wide before him the path of error, and to close up the narrow footway of truth, that even when any one pulled away the brambles and briars with which the latter had been blocked up, and showed him that there was really another path, he refused to follow it, and chose the wider and more travelled road.

Thus his conclusion was, after those few minutes' thought,—

“ This is all very well, and very specious;

but as we do not trust to a sick man to point out the remedies that will cure him, so must we not trust to these Huguenots to point out what would be the best means of converting them. However, Master Jerome Riquet, it is not in regard to opinions that I sent for you, I want to hear facts, if you please. Now tell me: do you remember, upon a certain occasion, a proclamation having been sent down to be read in the town of Morseuil, the King's officers having been insulted, and, I believe, pelted with stones, and the proclamation torn down?"

"No, Sire," replied Riquet boldly, for he was telling a lie, and therefore spoke confidently. "I remember my master going out in haste one day to prevent, he said, any bad conduct on the part of the people, and I remember hearing that he had caused the proclamation to be made himself in the market-place, in spite of some riotous folk, who would willingly have opposed it."

"High time that such folk should be put down," said the King. "These are the peaceable and obedient subjects, which the advocates of the Huguenots would fain persuade me that they are. But one question more on this head: did you see the young Count of Morseuil cause the gates of the town to be shut in the face of

my officers, or did you hear that he had done so, upon good authority?"

"No, Sire, I neither heard nor saw it," replied Riquet; "and, for myself, I was safely in the castle during the whole day."

"Do you remember," continued the King, looking at the paper, "having carried notes or letters from your master to different Protestant gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Poitiers, calling upon them to assemble and meet him at the house of another Huguenot, named M. de Corvoie?"

"No, Sire, oh no!" replied the man. "While we were at Poitiers, I only carried one note, and that was to the saddle-maker, who in repadding one of my lord's saddles, had done it so as to gall the horse's back."

"Sir, you are lying," said the King sternly.

Riquet once more cast himself upon his knees before the monarch, clasping his hands and exclaiming, "May I lose your Majesty's favour for ever, if I am not telling you the exact truth. Let any one who dares to say that I carried any other note than that which I have mentioned be confronted with me this moment, and I will prove, that he is shamefully deceiving your Majesty, for no other note did I carry, no,

not even a love letter. Otherwise, I could and would, not only tell your Majesty the fact, but every word that the notes contained."

"This is very extraordinary," said the King, "and I shall take care to inquire into it."

"I trust your Majesty will," replied the man boldly, for it may be recollectcd that he had not carried any note, but had been merely charged with a message to M. de Corvoie: "I trust that your Majesty will; for I assure you, on the faith of a valet de chambre, that no such transaction ever occurred. Did not they want to charge me — the very men who I dare say have brought this accusation — did they not want to charge me with having abstracted your Majesty's commission to Messieurs St. Helie and Pelisson, and with having placed a pack of cards in its stead; and were they not brought to shame by its being found out, that they themselves had done it, by fragments of the commission being found in one of their valises, wrapped like a dirty rag about an old tobacco box?"

"How is this? How is this?" exclaimed the King. "I heard that the commission had been abstracted, but I heard not this result — fragments of the commission wrapping a tobacco box found in their own valises!"

“ Ay, Sire,” replied the man, “ ‘tis all too true, for the examination was conducted in presence of Monsieur de Rouvré;” and with earnest volubility Maître Jerome set to work, and, in his own particular manner, gave the monarch a long and detailed, but rapid account of what had taken place on the return of the Count de Morseul to Poitiers, adding cunning commentaries in words, gesticulations, and grimaces, which scarcely left the King the power of retaining his due gravity, especially when Riquet personated to the life, the worthy Curé of Guadrieul, on the discovery of the paper in his valise.

While he was in the very act of making this detail, however, the door of the royal cabinet was opened, and a man of a harsh and disagreeable countenance, with a face somewhat red and blotched, but with great fire and intelligence in his eyes, entered the room, pausing for a single moment at the door, as if for permission.

“ Come in, Monsieur de Louvois, come in,” said the King. “ This is Jerome Riquet, the valet of the Count de Morseul, whom I told you I intended to examine. He puts a very different face upon several matters, however,

from that which we expected to find," and the King briefly recapitulated to his famous minister the information he had received from Riquet, leaving out however the first part of the conversation between them, which contained matter that could not be very agreeable to the minister.

A somewhat sneering smile came upon Louvois' countenance as he listened; and he replied, "I am very happy to hear, Sire, that the Count de Morseul is so good and faithful a servant to your Majesty. May I be permitted to ask this worthy person a question or two in your presence?"

The King bowed his head, and the minister, turning to Riquet, went on: "Although we have much more reason to think favourably of your master," he said, "than we had at first, yet there is one point in regard to which, though he did not actually commit a fault, he greatly neglected his duty, at least, so we are led to believe. We are assured, that shortly before he came up to Versailles, a great meeting of Huguenots in the open air took place upon a wild moor, within the limits of the young Count's lands, which meeting, though held for the peaceful purpose, we are told, of merely

preaching in the open air, terminated in bloodshed, and an attack upon a small body of the King's dragoons who were watching the proceedings."

Louvois' eye was fixed upon the valet all the time he spoke, and Jerome Riquet was making up his mind to deny steadily any knowledge of the transaction; but suddenly his whole views upon the subject were changed by the minister coming to the head and front of the Count's offence.

"Now," continued Louvois, "although there was certainly no law to compel the Count to be present on such an occasion, yet, when he knew that a meeting of this kind was about to take place on his own estates, and that dangerous consequences might ensue, he would but have shown his zeal and duty in the service of the King by going to the spot, and doing all that he could to make the proceedings tranquil and inoffensive."

"But the Count did go, Sir," exclaimed Riquet, "the Count did go, and I remember the fact of his going particularly."

"Are you ready to swear that he was there?" demanded Louvois.

"All I can say," replied the valet, "is, that

he left home for the purpose of going there. I was not present myself, but I heard from every one else that he was."

"And pray at what hour did he return that night?" demanded Louvois, "for the events that I speak of did not take place till near night-fall, and if the Count had been there till the whole assemblage had dispersed, a thousand to one no harm would have ensued."

"I cannot exactly tell at what hour he returned," said the valet, who was beginning to fancy that he was not exactly in the right road. "It was after nightfall, however."

"Recollect yourself," said Louvois, "was it nine, ten o'clock."

"It might be nearly ten," said the man.

"And, I think," said Louvois, his lip curling with a smile, bitter and fiend-like, "I think you were one of those, were you not, who went down on the following morning to the spot where the young Marquis de Hericourt had been murdered? Your name is amongst those who were seen there, so say no more. But now tell me, where is your master at this moment?"

Jerome Riquet smarted under a strong perception of having been outwitted; and the consequence was, that knowing, or at least believing,

that when a man falls into one such piece of ill luck, it generally goes on, with a sort of run against him ; he made up his mind to know as little as possible about any thing, for fear of falling into a new error, and replied to Louvois' question, that he could not tell.

“ Is he in his hotel at Versailles, or not, Sir ?” said the minister sternly ; “ endeavour to forget for once that you are professionally a liar, and give a straight-forward answer, for on your telling truth depends your immediate transmission to the Bastille or not. Was your master at home when you left the house, or out ?”

“ He was out then, Sir, certainly,” replied Riquet.

“ On horseback, or on foot ?” demanded Louvois.

“ On horseback,” replied the man.

“ Now, answer me one other question,” continued the minister. “ Have you not been heard, this very morning, to tell the head groom to have horses ready to go to Paris ?”

“ Sir,” said Jerome, with a look of impudent raillery that he dared not assume towards the King, but which nothing upon earth could have repressed in addressing Louvois at that moment, “ Sir, I feel convinced that I must possess

a valet de chambre without knowing it, for nobody on earth could repeat my words so accurately, unless I had some scoundrel of a valet to betray them as soon as they were spoken."

"Sir, your impudence shall have its just punishment," said Louvois, taking up a pen and dipping it in the ink, but the King waved his hand, saying, "Put down the pen, Monsieur de Louvois! You forget that you are in the King's cabinet and in his presence!—Riquet, you may retire."

Riquet did not need a second bidding, but, with a look of profound awe and reverence towards Louis, laid his hand upon his heart, lifted up his shoulders, like the jaws of a crocodile ready to swallow up his head, and bowing almost to the ground, walked backward out of the room. Louvois stood before the King, for an instant, with a look of angry mortification, which he suppressed with difficulty. Louis suffered him to remain thus, and, perhaps, did not enjoy a little the humiliation he had inflicted upon a man whom he, more than once in his life, declared to be perfectly insupportable, though he could not do without him. At length, however, he spoke in a grave but not an angry tone, saying,

"From the questions that you asked that

man just now, Monsieur de Louvois, I am led to believe that you have received some fresh information regarding this young gentleman — this Count de Morseiul. My determination up to this moment, strengthened by the advice of Monsieur de Meaux, Monsieur Pelisson, and others, is simply this: to pursue to the utmost the means of persuasion and conciliation in order to induce him, by fair means, to return to the bosom of the Catholic church.”

“ Better, Sire,” replied Louvois, “ far better cut him off like a withered and corrupted branch, unfit to be grafted on that goodly tree.”

“ You know, Marquis,” said the King, “ that I am always amenable to reason. I have expressed the determination which I had taken under particular circumstances. If you have other circumstances to communicate to me which may make me alter that opinion, do so straight-forwardly. Kings are as liable to error as other men, — perhaps, indeed, more so; for they see truth at a distance, and require perspective glasses to examine it well, which are not always at hand. If I am wrong I am ready to change my resolution, though it is always a part of a king’s duty to decide speedily when he can do it wisely.”

“ The simple fact, Sire,” replied Louvois, with the mortification under which he still smarted affecting his tone of voice; “ the simple fact is, as your Majesty must have divined from the answers that man gave me, I have now clear and distinct proof that this Count de Morseuil has, throughout the insignificant but annoying troubles occasioned by the Huguenots in Poitou, been the great fomenter of all their discontent, and their leader in actual insurrection. He was not only present at this preaching in the desert, as these fanatics call it, and led all the proceedings, by a speech upon the occasion highly insulting to your Majesty’s authority and dignity; with all which your Majesty has already been made acquainted — ”

“ But upon not very clear and conclusive evidence,” said the King. “ Upon evidence, Monsieur de Louvois, which should condemn none of my subjects before a court of law, and, therefore, not before his sovereign. That he made a speech is clear; but some of the witnesses deposed, that it was only to recommend moderation and tranquillity, and to beseech them, on no account, to appear on such occasions with arms.”

“ All hypocrisy, Sire,” replied Louvois. “ I have had two of the dragoons with me this morning who were present with my unfortunate cousin, young De Hericourt, and they are quite ready and willing to swear that he, this Count de Morseiul, began the affray by striking that young officer from his horse.”

“ Without provocation?” demanded the King, his brow growing somewhat cloudy.

“ They saw none given,” replied Louvois, “ and they were close to him. Not only this, but, as it is shown that he did not himself return to his own house till late at night; that De Hericourt never returned at all; and that the two were angry rivals for the hand of this very Mademoiselle de Marly, there is strong reason to believe that they met after the affair on the moor, and that the unhappy young man was slain by the hand of the Count of Morseiul.”

“ This is something new, indeed,” said the King. “ Have you any further information, Monsieur de Louvois?”

“ Merely the following, Sire,” replied the minister, “ that, in the course of yesterday evening, the famous fanatic minister, Claude de l’Estang, the great stay of the self-styled re-

formed church, who, on more than one occasion, in his youth opposed your royal father in arms, and has, through life, been the great friend and adviser of these Counts of Morseiul, arrived in Paris last night, sent a billet down to the Count this morning, and further, that the Count immediately went up to visit him. Unfortunately the news was communicated to me too late to take measures for tracking the Count from Versailles to the hiding-place of the minister, whom it is desirable to lay hands upon if possible. The Count was tracked, indeed, to his own hotel in Paris; but, just before I came hither, the messenger returned to tell me, that as soon as Monsieur de Morseiul had arrived at his own house he had gone out again on foot, and all further trace of him was lost. What I would urge upon your Majesty's attention, then, is this, that if you suffer him to trifle away many days, persuading you and good Monsieur Bossuet, that he intends to yield and return to the church, you will suffer this affair of the preaching, the tumult, the murder of some of your loyal subjects, and the previous factious conduct of this young man, to drop and be forgotten; and you cannot well revive it after any length of time, as it is known, already, that full

information has been laid before you on the subject. It does seem to me, Sire," continued the minister, seeing that Louis was much moved by his reasonings, "it does seem to me that you have but one choice. You must either, believing, as I do, that the Count de Morseil has not the slightest intention of ever becoming a convert from the heresy which he now professes, determine upon arresting him and punishing him for the crimes with which he is charged, should they be proved; or else you must grant him your royal favour and pardon, put it out of your own power to investigate further the matter, bestow upon him the hand of Mademoiselle de Marly, and leave fate, and his own inclinations, to convert him to the Catholic faith, or not, as may happen."

"I certainly shall not take the latter alternative," replied the King. "The circumstances you have brought forward are extremely strong, especially this renewed visit to Claude de l'Estang. I am not one to show indecision where firmness is necessary, Louvois. In an hour or two, whenever I think it probable that he is returned to Versailles, I will send to require his presence. I will question him myself upon his belief, ascertain the probability of his

conversion, and determine at once. If I find your statement correct —— ”

“ Sire,” cried Louvois, interrupting the King, as was too often his custom to do, “ there is little use of your asking him any questions but one simple one ; the answer to which must, at once, satisfy so great and magnanimous a mind as yours, and you will see that I entertain no feeling of personal enmity to the young man by the question that I am about to suggest. If he answer that question candidly, straightforwardly, and, at once, in the manner and sense which your Majesty can approve, give him your favour, raise him high, distinguish him in every manner : but if he prevaricates, hesitates, or answers in a sense and manner which your Majesty cannot approve, send him to the Bastille.”

“ But what is the question ? ” demanded the King eagerly. “ What is the question, Monsieur de Louvois ? ”

“ This, Sire,” replied Louvois : “ Monsieur de Morseiul, I beg and command of you, as your king and your benefactor, to tell me whether there is, or is not, really any chance of your ever becoming a convert to the true Catholic faith of this realm ? ”

Louvois, by putting such a question into the King's mouth, showed not only how intimately he was acquainted with Louis's weaknesses, but also how well he knew the firmness and candour of the young Count de Morseuil. He knew, in short, that the latter would tell the truth, and that the former would condemn it.

"Nothing can be fairer," replied the King, "nothing can be fairer, Monsieur de Louvois. I will put that question to him exactly, and upon his answer to it he shall stand or fall."

"So thoroughly am I convinced, Sire, of what the result will be," continued Louvois, "that I will beseech your Majesty to give me authority to have him arrested immediately after he leaves you, in case you send me no order to the contrary."

"Certainly," replied the King, "certainly. I will sign the order immediately."

"Allow me to remind you, Sire," replied Louvois, "that you signed one the other day, which is already in the hands of Cantal, only you ordered me to suspend the execution. That will do quite well, and Cantal will be at hand to put it in force."

"Be it so," said the Monarch, "be it so; but let Cantal be in the way at the time I send

for the young Count, that I may signify to him that he is not to arrest the Count if the answer I receive satisfies me. And now, Monsieur de Louvois, what news regarding this business of Dunkirk?"

The King and his minister then turned to other matters, and having concluded the principal part of the affairs they had in hand, were talking somewhat lightly of other matters, when one of the attendants, who knew that the hour of Louvois was over, opened the door and interrupted their further conversation, by announcing, to the surprise of both, that the Count de Morseil was in waiting, beseeching, earnestly, a moment's audience of the Monarch. The King turned his eyes upon Louvois, as if to inquire, "What is the meaning of this?" but a moment or two after he bade the attendant give the Count admission.

"Then I had better take my leave, Sire," said the minister, "and give Cantal a hint to be in readiness;" and taking up the papers from which he had been reading some extracts to the Monarch, Louvois bowed low and quitted the room.

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